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Garth

JULIAN HAWTHORNE

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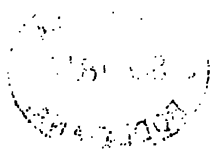

GARTH.

A Novel.

BY

JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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1877.

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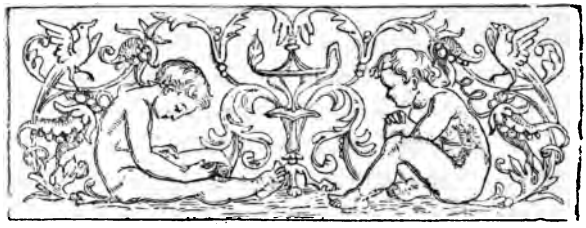

GARTH.

BOOK VIII.

LEAVEN.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE PHYSICIAN.

THE meeting between Mr. Urmson and Professor Grindle had not been outwardly effusive. The professor's bald pate had reddened a little as he strongly griped his old fellow-student's hand, and he had said, "How do, Urmson?" in his usual abrupt, bass tones, perhaps made a little more uncompromising than usual to keep up the good old Anglo-Saxon traditions of unfeelingness. Mr. Urmson had replied, "How do you do, professor?" and after the exchange of a few questions and observations of no less momentous import, the two elderly gentlemen

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left the younger people to themselves, and proceeded in total silence up-stairs, Cuthbert leading, and the professor tramping sternly after him. In silence they entered Garth's chamber, and there the professor stood for a moment, motionless but observant, by the bedside. Then, without having touched the invalid, or emitted so much as a single professional grunt, he stepped back to the door, and beckoning to his companion, they went silently out into the hall again.

"Let him sleep," said the professor. "Lead on to your chamber, Urmson. Must smoke a cigar and toast my toes after that drive. The winter's upon us; you'll catch it up here sooner than we shall. Ay, I see; not much desk work for you nowadays. Nursing. And Mrs. Urmson not here to help." Since Mrs. Urmson's marriage this old lover of hers, who had never told his love either to her or to any one else, had refrained from speaking of her by her Christian name; and this not from any unworthy jealousy, but because he derived a stern, unselfish pleasure from the thought that the only woman he had loved belonged to the man whom he loved best, and chose to keep that fact before his mind by always giving her the name she was married to.

"Heaven is too near us, I sometimes think," Cuthbert answered. "The people we want most are so apt to slip into it out of our reach."

"'Tisn't that the boy needed her," said Grindle,

taking a brand from the hearth and lighting his cigar with a series of short rapid whiffs. "He'll do very well—a strong grip of life, sir. 'Twas you I referred to more particularly, Urmson. You're not looking as I'd like to have you. You have that in your face, my man, that—none of your late communications had prepared me to see there. Now as your physician, I'll ask you a question or two Your mother was a Danver, was she not? What was her constitution?"

"Take off your spectacles, Tom," said Cuthbert, colouring slightly; "you'll be sharp-sighted enough without them. I didn't get you here for this. However— No, nothing was developed in her, God bless her! It came, if anything, from her mother, who belonged to another stock—a poor one. She died of it."

Grindle took off his glasses and rested his elbows on his knees. "Ay, ay," he said slowly, gazing into the fire. "And that has always somewhat posed me, Cuthbert. That old curse—why did the Lord pronounce it against his creatures?—'The children's teeth shall be set on edge.' How often does the children's suffering accomplish the erring parent's reformation? It never can. What knows or cares that dead and buried and forgotten woman—or it may have been *her* father or mother—that you sit there hand in hand with disease, who might have been a vigorous man still, full of health and power?

Such a curse seems only to revenge; not to restrain, nor to requite justly."

"I suppose you must have a personal interest in such problems before you can expect to tackle them, Tom. What I have felt is, that the curse may smite the body and pass through to bless the soul. For, after all, I wasn't a perfect man when you and I used to argue the universe in college; nor afterward, even—quite. Some complaints you were in the habit of making anent the evils of a too ironical and self-complacent disposition, if my memory fail not. My grandmamma has very likely not cured me of those imperfections—not even bettered me, perhaps; but I'm self-complacent enough to believe she has kept me from intensifying them, and ironical enough to hope that she is none the worse off herself for having done so."

"Inform me how long this has been coming on you, my man."

"More than a year—a good deal more. Slow, but knows how to make itself felt."

"Where?" demanded Grindle, after a long puff at his cigar, still keeping his eyes upon the fire. Cuthbert's only answer was to put his hand for a moment over his breast. Then the two friends looked at each other. The professor, whose face during the past twenty and odd years had not been trained to the expression of tender emotions, wore an aspect of gloomy severity, as though he were re-

proving some delinquent for a grave misdemeanour; while Cuthbert's pale and slender visage had rather an arch and demurely unrepentant look, as if defying the other's sternness to do its worst.

"Had you acquainted me with this promptly, Urmson"—Grindle began. But he did not finish his sentence. He replaced his spectacles, leaned back in his chair, and continued his smoking. His large-boned but not fleshy figure, high bald forehead, and massive Roman nose were silhouetted against the brightness of the window at the other side of the room. He was still a strong and able man, though somewhat Cuthbert's senior in years; and while the silence lasted, the latter was indulging in the quaint speculation whether, in the next world, his friend would exhibit a spiritual excellence corresponding to his present physical superiority, or whether he would take rank by his mental qualities alone. But the settlement of the question was indefinitely put off by the interruption of Grindle himself.

"I'll not speak to you as a physician, then," said he. "Some alleviation may be practicable; but you don't require me to tell you, Cuthbert, what the end must be. Now, however, since I must leave you to-morrow, it would be advisable to go through with our business affairs and get them finally settled. When we may meet again, no man knows. I shall try to come up during the Christmas holi-

days; but *quid sit futurum cras fuge quærere.* Your brother Golightley, I presume, is at least independent of you?"

"Yes, so far as money goes, and for the time being."

"I forbore questioning him on the subject, though he once or twice hinted toward it. I own to disliking his physiognomy and the ring of his voice: twenty years of college boys have made me over-critical, no doubt. Has he suggested reimbursement?"

"I fancy we can do without that," said Cuthbert, with a slight nervous movement of his shoulders and hands.

"You have the produce of your garden and orchard," returned Grindle, puffing uncompromisingly at his cigar, "and nothing else. The interest of Eve's legacy amounts to less than twenty-five hundred dollars this year, and when Mrs. Danver's 'patent' annuity has been paid out of it, and the other regular and incidental expenses met, there'll be about one hundred left over. That's your year's income, sir. There's not a poorer man than you in the village. How do you pay your butcher?"

"Why, we pelt him with apples. But you forget Garth's canvas and my pen and paper. Moreover, Golightley is ready to pay his board. We are doing first-rate."

"Well, well, sir, that's your own affair. And there's this to be said—if you have reason to be ashamed of your own improvidence, you have still greater cause to congratulate yourself on the way Providence makes it up to you. If you had not, years and years ago, consented to your father's laying an embargo on that fifty thousand dollars—a proceeding, sir, against which every principle of prudence and economy seemed to protest—"

"*You* protested, if I remember rightly, Tom," interrupted Cuthbert, arching his eyebrow; "but the economic principles were rather on our side. So soon as poor Golightley's drafts began to be a matter of course, I, with my unfailing sagacity, foresaw the future up to this very day, and perceived that unless the legacy had been put out of reach in that way, it would have been drafted away with the rest. Then I informed Golightley of the exact amount at my disposal, and explained to him the worse than uselessness of overdrawing. And he never did overdraw."

"Ah, he had no lien upon Eve's rights, whatever he may have had upon yours. Captain Urmson had that fact in mind, I apprehend, when he executed the codicil. He never really believed but that the girl was tomahawked; but he had a presentiment that Golightley would make trouble, and so used Eve's name to secure you at least half the

property. It may almost be called your own now, the allotted term of years is so nearly out."

"Five or six years hence seems a long 'now' to a fellow in my condition," remarked Cuthbert, with a smile.

"You have got the same erroneous impression that I had till lately. 'Tis true, the codicil was executed some years later than the will; but whether by accident or design, the date of the will governs the provisions of the codicil; therefore, unless the persons therein mentioned appear within the next few months, their claim will be antiquated. Ay, ay, you are providentially favoured so far as that goes, and Garth will have something to get married on."

"Unless the persons therein mentioned do appear," Cuthbert murmured, half to himself, and he added, aloud, "Did you speak of this to my brother?"

"No, sir," said Grindle, with emphasis. "As I said, he does not inspire me with confidence. By-the-bye, he made some remarks on Madge, who seems to have grown into a lovely young woman; he volunteered some reflections on her which I can hardly reconcile with my own impression of her. Do you like the match?"

"It has been a long engagement, you know," replied Cuthbert, with some hesitation, "and one might suppose that if there were any incompati-

bility, it would have come to the surface before now. Nevertheless, I think it would be juster to both parties if this discovery of yours about the codicil were kept private for a time. However ardent Madge's affection for Garth may be, I fancy money would inflame it still more; and though in process of time she might find Garth a little wearisome, I'm sure she would remain constant to—Plutus.

"Oho! Cuthbert, I'm sorry to hear this—heartily sorry. Your brother's insinuations, had I been inclined to accept them, might have prepared me for it. No; Garth is no fit rival for Plutus. But is that lovely girl . . . . . ?" Professor Grindle mused a moment and sighed. His interviews with Madge had been brief and far between, yet enough, apparently, to render this new light thrown upon her character something more than a disappointment to him. Under ordinary circumstances, he would uncompromisingly have rebelled against any depreciation of her; but Cuthbert, unlike most people, was accustomed to say less than he meant, and only to say that upon grave occasion. "Have you hinted of this to Garth?" Grindle added.

"I have always allowed Garth's opinions to correct themselves, Tom. He is often wrong; but when he is right, he knows why. I may as well unburden my soul to you: I hope they won't marry; and if Garth can manage to stay poor a while longer, I don't believe they will. The situation is a peculiar one. She likes him well enough, all but his artistic

phase; and he, if he would abjure his art, would love her fiercely with all that remained—that is, with the less noble part of him. He partly understands that, I think, and dreads it the more because, at the same time, he feels it a temptation. You can understand, Tom, how Madge might tempt a hot-hearted yet undemonstrative young fellow like him."

"Ay, very well," said Grindle, nodding his head slowly. "And, being betrothed, honour would seem to throw its weight into the wrong scale. 'Tis an awkward knot for the boy to untie, indeed. But if Madge has made up her mind for riches, she will untie it for him."

"She must not be depended on either for good or ill. I believe her capable of making a great sacrifice, if her feminine perversity be inflamed. Jealousy, or pique, or a sudden impulse of admiration for his physical manliness, would be likely to drive her straight into Garth's arms, though it is quite as likely that she would repent the day afterward. She is a good deal more or less than mercenary. But her attackable point is her self-esteem. She would hardly believe that Garth could tire of her, or esteem her second to any other woman; and feeling no anxiety about the security of her power over him, she naturally values him the less. Besides, I fancy his illness has rather cooled her regard than warmed it: she is like a beautiful animal in her inability to sympathise with physical suffering.

"Don't tell me she hasn't been at his side through it all, Urmson! What did your brother say about her having played him to sleep this very morning?"

"Not Madge. That was Elinor."

"That cold, silent girl? Elinor—hardly saw her, Sir!" Grindle took his short beard in his hand, and crossed his leg emphatically toward his interlocutor. "Hey? Elinor— Is that another complication, Urmson? Unless my recollection's at fault, it was to an Elinor that your brother told me he was betrothed. Hey?"

"The engagement has been made public, and need not further concern us," returned Cuthbert, with one of his quiet looks of dismissal. "Elinor took Mrs. Tenterden's place for to-day, that's all; and Garth seems to have improved more by an hour with her than by what the rest of us could do for him in three weeks. She has the nursing talent, which Madge lacks, and seemingly she didn't fear contagion."

"Typhoid contagious!" said Grindle, grimly chuckling.

"So say many; and I have thought it as well not to combat the prejudice. Mrs. Tenterden, though most kind and helpful downstairs, would be a little tremendous in a sick-chamber; and Madge, since she seemed inclined to keep away at any rate, would be none the worse for a pretext both for justifying her resolution and making her stick to it. 'This only is the witchcraft I have used.'"

"You are a more subtle man than Othello—but always in an honest way, too," observed Grindle, slowly settling back into gravity. "Well, well. If music physics him best, and neither Madge nor Golightley objects, the experiment is worth prosecuting. Cold, she seemed to me—impassive. Not handsome either, though refined. Must look at her again. But, by-the-bye, how came Madge, your beautiful animal, to put herself in the way of sick-rooms and contagion to-day? Is she returning to humanity?"

"If it were not Madge, I should lay it to Elinor's having come first; but I can't account for it. She was in a rather remarkable mood. Something must have happened, I think, which has put her out of her usual course. There's no use in speculating about it; but once kindled or goaded into full emotional and intellectual activity, Madge would be a very interesting and unconventional object. Come, Tom, throw away your cigar, and let's see whether the sick boy is awake yet."

"He'll come out of it, sir," said Grindle, getting to his feet, and standing for a moment with his fists upon his hips, gazing into the fire. "All he needs is care, patience, and eating. Let the young lady play to him once in a while, if he likes it. Must have a word with her, by-the-bye, before I go. Lead on, lead on."

CHAPTER LX.

NIKOMIS'S LODGER.

MEANWHILE, it is no less than the due of so respectable a personage as Nikomis that some inquiry should be made into her doings on this somewhat eventful morning. The old lady was a notable "medicine woman," from an Indian point of view; and, in her own opinion, Garth's recovery, if it took place, would be mainly owing to what she had done for him. Her chief concern, however, had all along been rather for Cuthbert than for him. Toward Cuthbert her sentiments had, during the past ten years, undergone some important modifications, the full significance of which may appear later on. But it may be mentioned in this place that something like a feeling of mutual respect had grown up between the two; and this had ripened latterly into a peculiar confidential relation, unsuspected by any third person,

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not only as to its nature, but in itself. Among other matters, Nikomis had been made acquainted with the character of the disease from which Cuthbert was suffering, and which, in all human probability, must sooner or later make an end of him. It might, however, be alleviated, and to this good end the Indian had taxed the best resources of her knowledge and experience. But the anxiety of mind and bodily exhaustion brought about by Garth's illness had hastened the progress of his father's trouble, and Nikomis, while nursing both invalids with tolerable impartiality, could not free herself from a shade of resentment toward the younger man for sapping, however unconsciously, the springs of the elder's life.

When Cuthbert, therefore, went to lie down early that morning, leaving Garth in her care, she resolved that he and not Garth should get the first benefit of her ministrations. She had already prepared a narcotic, famous in her Indian pharmacy for its soothing and restorative virtues, and possibly had enhanced its efficacy by distilling it under certain aspects of the moon, or muttering over it spells which made it worth all the unbewitched nostrums in the world. Be that as it may, she now poured a sufficient dose of it into a wine-glass, disguised its flavour with a little brandy, and got Cuthbert to swallow it between waking and sleeping. Then, leaving the glass upon the table, she

hobbled grimly off to Garth's chamber—as unprepossessing a herald of health, perhaps, as ever did her best for two human lives. Garth having been made as easy as might be, Nikomis betook herself to the congenial kitchen, intending, no doubt, to spend an hour or so over a pipe and a tumbler of grog. Ere she could establish herself in her wonted corner, however, her attention was caught by a scratching sound, alternating with a low, whining whimper, which seemed to come from outside the back-door that opened upon the orchard. An ordinary listener would have supposed that some vagabond dog, chilled by the night air and emboldened by hunger, was trying to gain admittance to the warm hearth and the hospitality of a bone. But Nikomis was not an ordinary listener; she had the ears and instincts of the savage, and so seemingly commonplace a sound as this had for her a meaning as definite and clear as the most straightforward utterance of sentences could have conveyed. She stood rigid, with her head thrust forward and her breath drawn. The noise came again; she took a few quick, moccasined steps forward, and pausing close to the door, gave vent to an answering whimper, ending in a muffled bark. There was a brief pause, and then the door was cautiously opened, and a tall man, carrying a heavy oblong box strapped to his shoulders, and a stout smooth cudgel in his hand, appeared on the threshold.

"All alone, granny?" he asked in a rapid, sliding utterance, still holding the door latch in his hand, and peering round and beyond her as he spoke.

Nikomis gazed at him intently—so intently that the faculty of speech seemed temporarily lost to her; but on the tall man's repeating his inquiry somewhat impatiently, she made a gesture of assent with her hand, still keeping her black eyes fixed upon his face. After yet a moment's hesitation, he came in, with a step rapid and sliding, like his voice, though at the same time there was about his bearing a something half defiant, half jaunty, which indicated a man whose satisfaction with himself had outlived his faith and reliance on most other matters. He was dressed in a dirty velveteen jacket and torn felt hat; his black hair hung in straight black masses about a swarthy face, which might have been handsome but for the disfigurement of a pair of green spectacles with heavy brass bows to them. Altogether, he had rather an Italian aspect; and the heavy burden upon his shoulders, which on a nearer glance appeared to be a hand-organ, might have confirmed a stranger in assigning him that nationality. It was ten to one that he was a Neapolitan organ-grinder in very needy circumstances.

"What you staring at, granny?" demanded he in a whisper, putting his hand briskly on the old

woman's shoulder. "Glad t' see me, eh? Why don't you say so, then? Here," he added, "help me off with this damned old box, granny, and carry it up to the wigwam for me. Got wigwam up in the garret, eh?—I know." He slipped the broad leathern strap down from his shoulder and swung the organ round against Nikomis, who helped him lower it noiselessly to the ground. "That feels good," said he, expanding his chest and giving his shoulders a shake. "I've carried that thing all the way from Boston, granny. You get it up to the garret right off. Wait a minute!" He took her abruptly by the arm again. "Sure all safe here—what? no harm in th' house—what?"

Nikomis put up her hand doubtfully and took the disfiguring green spectacles from the man's nose. The black eyes thus disclosed were handsome and penetrating, but evasive. But to Nikomis they were dearer than her own. "Sam!" said she, fastening her long knotty fingers on his tall shoulders, and looking up at him in a kind of spasm of grotesque delight. "You at home now. This all safe—your home. Nikomis bid you welcome." With the last words she straightened herself and made a waving gesture of greeting with her hand, as though she were an envoy come to present a palace to a monarch. Sam laughed—an almost noiseless laugh, covering his teeth

with his lips and ducking his chin down to his breast.

"You very grand, old woman! My home—I know; but there's some little things to be settled up first, you know. Let's see, now—Garth sick, is he? But where's the old man?—he sick too?"

"Cuthbert sleeps," returned the Indian. "Why you come this way?" she added, noticing for the first time the significance of his disguise. "Why you make look so poor, Sam? You not rich any more? Anybody you're afraid of?"

"Oh, well, that's a long story; tell you all about it directly, granny—too damned hungry for any pow-wow now. Show me where I can get something to eat, first thing; and take that old organ-box upstairs—d' you hear? Got all my things in it—mustn't be where anybody can find it. I'm going to keep dark for a while, granny—d' you understand? Come now, show me where the meat is."

Nikomis, although accustomed to exact and receive ceremonious treatment from all pale-faced mortals, seemed ready to accept with meekness any amount of this dark-skinned vagabond's cavalier behaviour. She set a plentiful meal before him, and then returning to the box, contrived with difficulty to mount it on her venerable back, and so to lug it slowly and uncomplainingly up to her wigwam. Arrived there, she seated herself upon it

and spent a few minutes in regaining her breath, both physical and metaphysical. Rising at length, she made a few alterations in the arrangement of the place; and when all was ordered to her satisfaction, she hobbled silently down to the kitchen again, where Sam was leaning back in his chair and enjoying the luxury of appeased appetite. The beef and bread, and still more the flattering unction of a glass of brandy, had evidently won him to a more genial mood.

"There you are again, granny! So the old thing didn't break your back, after all—what? Oh, I knew you wouldn't mind it. Didn't you lug me on your shoulders when I was a pappoose, and your cursed old knee was out of joint? Hobbling still, are you? That's right. So you remembered the signals we used to have ten years ago, 'nd let in your little Sammy that had been away so long! He been through great lot of things since he saw you last, granny. Come along up to th' wigwam, 'nd he'll tell you about it."

Nikomis signified her willingness to lead the way, and Sam, having slipped off his travel-stained boots, followed her up to the first floor. The door of Cuthbert's room stood ajar; the half-breed peeped in, and seeing how soundly the inmate slept, he glided stealthily up to the bedside. Nikomis, who had remained at the entrance, saw him stoop down and listen to the old man's low-drawn breathing.

Then he drew a straight, narrow-bladed knife from an inner pocket of his coat, and made a pass with it toward the sleeper's heart. Nikomis uttered a guttural exclamation, loud enough to have waked Cuthbert but for the sleeping potion he had taken, and clutched forward vehemently with both hands. Sam had turned the point aside just as it arrived within a hair's-breadth of the other's breast; but at Nikomis's cry he uplifted the knife again, while his features took on a more sinister expression than they had yet worn, and for a few moments he stood in position to strike, watching if Cuthbert's eyelids trembled. But he lay as quiet and untroubled as though the breadth of the world had interposed between him and violence. Sam now threw a glance of jeering defiance toward the door, turned the knife in his hand, and, with a rapid motion of the wrist, made a pretence of taking Mr. Urmson's scalp. Then slipping the weapon back into his pocket, and laughing one of his silent laughs, he came away.

"What made you yell out, you old fool?" he said, as he rejoined Nikomis. "What should you care 'f I stuck him? I'd 'a done it 'f he'd waked; 'most sorry he didn't. Him and Garth too, curse 'em! Where is Garth? Never mind, never mind; I'd cut his heart out 'f I were to see him—couldn't help myself. All right, all right; we'll be even with 'em some day. Come on, granny."

They creaked up the attic stairs together, and entered Nikomis's apartment. It was at the corner of the garret opposite to Garth's studio, partitioned off from the intermediate space by a rough boarding, and lighted by two small windows cut in the northern and western walls. But Nikomis ignored wooden walls, and had fitted up the interior in such a manner as vividly to recall the aboriginal wigwam. Seven or eight bean poles were fixed at the circumference of a large circular space on the floor, and leaned toward one another until they met in a clump just below the ceiling. Around this framework were draped a number of old skins and blankets, so that the whole formed a rude tent, quite dark within, save when the loose flap that served as a door was folded back. When this was done, however, and the eyes had had time to get used to the gloom, the floor was seen to be carpeted with dried sweet-fern; and the bed or mattress at one side was formed of a thicker layer of the same heathery shrub, covered over with a threadbare rug. Around the sloping sides of the structure might be dimly discerned various savage implements and trophies, while strings of coloured beads, charms, medicine-bags, and a number of quaint utensils, such as only an inveterate old witch like Nikomis could have imagined any use for, glimmered duskily here and there. But perhaps the most impressive sight, albeit the one least likely to be discernible to prying

eyes, was the row of questionable objects dangling from a string which stretched from one side to another of the wigwam, at about a man's height from the floor. They resembled bunches of dried sea-weed as much as any thing, or small clots of turf, with long fine tufts of grass depending from them. In fact, however, they were no such innocent matter: they were an assortment of old smoke-dried scalps, cut from their enemies' heads by Nikomis's forefathers, and by her jealously preserved and prized, together with the bloody legends belonging to each one of them. In her more pensive moments the old lady may be supposed to have derived as much consolation from a view of these ghastly mementos, dully illumined by the lurid glow from the bowl of her tobacco-pipe, as would a more civilised personage from the gold-mounted miniatures of her deceased grandparents and uncles, with locks of their hair braided neatly into the backs of the frames, and covered over with glass.

Into this retreat did Nikomis introduce her tall companion, bidding him make himself at home there. He glanced about somewhat discontentedly, and would plainly have preferred more commodious quarters, even at the cost of a good part of the aboriginal flavour. But there was no present opportunity of improving matters, and he was fain to content himself with such solace as lay in a pipe. His hostess's rank old clays failing to suit his taste,

which a residence abroad seemed to have rendered fastidious, he unlocked his hand-organ and rummaged among the medley of clothes, toilet articles, skates, perfumed letters, and other personal furniture which it contained, until he laid hold of a finely-coloured meerschaum. This he filled with some fragrant tobacco from an oil-skin bag, and then laying himself at length upon Nikomis's sweet-fern mattress, he began a leisurely account of his adventures.

CHAPTER LXI.

CHANGES.

TO judge from his own version of them, they reflected great credit upon his physical address and intrepidity, upon his cunning, and upon his freedom from moral prejudices. Probably he described his ideal self, and no doubt he occasionally ornamented the events to match the hero of them. Nevertheless, the main thread of the story must have coincided more or less closely with the truth, and it certainly indicated a career of considerable vicissitude. After leaving Urmsworth, Sam, as we know, went to Newburyport, where Cuthbert supported him for upward of a year as an independent apprentice at the gun-making trade. But the young fellow had altogether too much ambition to think of settling down in life as a gunsmith. About the time that his tedium was ready to drive him into some ill-advised esca-

pade or other, a lucky accident occurred to him. It was the year of the robbery of the Newburyport bank. Neither in the deed itself nor in the plotting of it did Sam have any hand; but it so happened that a pistol, whose stock he recognised as his own handiwork, led him on to the discovery of the criminals; and so coolly and astutely did he manage matters as to compel their purchase of his silence at the price of no less than five hundred dollars. Possessed of this vast sum, he felt that the world lay before him, and he was resolved to lose no time in making trial of it. Ere setting forth, however, he bethought himself that it would be a pleasant thing to have the society of an agreeable and clever companion on his travels; and he made a secret expedition to Urmsworth in order to persuade the person of his choice to join him. She hesitated and wavered long, but finally yielded; and it was in Nikomis's former wigwam, on the borders of the forest, that the arrangements for the elopement were made. It was on a Saturday evening, about the middle of March, and the flight was to take place the night following. All went well, and the fugitives had got safely to the borders of the lake, and were almost on the point of embarking on Sam's boat, when the unexpected apparition of Garth, stripped to his waist, and shooting the rapids in his canoe, changed the young lady's mind. After a brisk dispute with her would-be abductor, the

pair separated, she stealing quietly back to the little cottage on the village outskirts, while Sam rowed across the lake alone, and five days later sailed out of Boston Harbour in a vessel bound for Liverpool.

Over the first five or six years of his European life he passed very lightly, and it is not improbable that he may have looked back upon them with something less than pure satisfaction. His money was soon spent, and he set himself to get some more. At one time he was a member of a circus *troupe*, and by his own account achieved vast success as a bare-back rider. Later he engaged as groom in the family of an English nobleman connected with the turf, and by taking advantage of "private information," he contrived to land a large sum on the Derby of that year. From this he might have gone on and made a fortune, had he not unfortunately persuaded himself, with cause or without, that his employer's daughter, whom he was in the habit of attending on her rides, was in love with him. In the midst of his hopes he received a summons to his master's presence, when the latter handed him his wages and then fell upon him with a horsewhip. Sam resisted; the nobleman was worsted in the fray; and the upshot was that Sam was heavily fined for assault and battery.

He now left England and crossed over to the

Continent. Establishing himself at Baden-Baden, he cut a considerable dash with the remains of his Derby winnings, gambled with a good deal of success, and was accounted a personage of distinction. One of the stock countesses of the place, however, induced him to enter into a partnership. At the critical moment the outraged husband made his appearance, picked his quarrel with Sam, and demanded satisfaction. This he received—though in an irregular way. Sam, having accepted the challenge for the next morning, provided himself with a whip and a pistol, surprised the countess and her accomplice at their rooms that night, forced the woman to gag the man and tie him, half-naked, to the bed-post; then himself did a like service for her, and grasping his whip, set to work with a will upon both his enemies, nor held his hand until both hung fainting and bloody before him. In that situation did he leave them, locking the door upon them and carrying off the key in his pocket. The next evening he was safe in Paris, though with only a hundred francs in his purse, and the clothes he wore. This episode Sam related with relish, nor did Nikomis withhold the applause of glittering eyes and sympathetic grunts.

But there can be little doubt that for a long time thereafter the adventurer experienced almost unmitigated ill luck, and made acquaintance with very low depths of life indeed. He dodged about from

one great city to another, trying his fortune at cards, billiards, thimble-rigging, acrobatism, or whatever else would put a little money in his scrip. About this period he began to be aware that by a sort of continuous coincidence he kept meeting a rather good-looking, stylishly-dressed gentleman, who seemed to have no more settled residence or occupation than himself, but who uniformly associated with conspicuous personages, lived luxuriously, and fared sumptuously every day. Sam never had any communication with this gentleman, never knew who he was, and seldom got near enough to him even to distinguish the sound of his voice. But he thought he remembered catching a glimpse of him on the day of his landing in Liverpool; he believed he had once distinguished his blue eye-glasses among the spectators at the circus, and he was sure he had seen him make a bet at the Derby, and afterward drink a glass of water at the spring in Baden-Baden. By degrees, therefore, he came to regard him as somehow connected with himself—a repetition, in a higher sphere and with distinguished fortune, of his own vagabond personality. This superstitious fancy affected Sam differently at different times. Now he felt a sort of irrational attachment to the man who played so well the part in the world which it was his own ambition to play; now he hated him for being so like and yet so hopelessly above him. At one

moment he hailed him as an omen and prefigurement of what he himself was destined to become; at another, he cursed him as the tantalising ideal which he never would attain. Sometimes he hoped to raise himself to his level; sometimes he longed for the power to drag him down to his own. Occasionally months would go by without their meeting; then, again, they would seem to dog each other week after week. Sam wondered what the issue of it all would be.

He was now about twenty-two years old, rather striking in appearance, with manners smoothed by contact with mankind, yet retaining enough individual flavour to be noticeable. His faculties were alert and keen; his passions violent yet cold; his bodily vigour and versatility were much beyond the average. His native stock of cunning had been considerably enlarged, and he had rid himself of all such moral and social prejudices as would be likely to impede him in the struggle for existence. He desired the good of no living creature but himself, and he was ready to believe evil of anything or anybody. On the whole, his chance of getting ahead of circumstances was worth backing; but what he desperately needed and could not obtain was a secure and respectable footing from which to act.

One day, in Vienna, after an unusual run of luck at billiards, which had enabled him to deck himself

out in better raiment than ordinary, he strolled into a handsome *café* to get a glass of brandy and a cigar. From his table he could see through a half-open door into an inner private room, where four gentlemen were playing cards. Three of these Sam knew by sight as persons of consequence in the city—wealthy men, either connected with the government or prominent in finance. The fourth, who sat nearest the door, he immediately recognised as his man of destiny. The sight occasioned him no surprise, though he had not before known that the mysterious being was in Vienna. Their fates were intertwined, although they might never come into direct contact.

The game was one which Sam held in especial favour, perhaps because he had devised a simple but exceedingly ingenious trick, which made winning almost a certainty, while detection was next to impossible. All that was required in it were three prepared cards and a fair amount of manual dexterity. As the swarthy and saturnine adventurer moodily watched the play, he cursed the luck that prevented him from taking a hand at such a table. What was the use of sleight of hand and ingenuity if one had only shabby fellows, with coppers in their pockets, to practise upon? One hour in the chair now occupied by his unknown other self would be worth ten years' swindling of empty pockets. What he lacked was a word of introduction. Once estab-

lished on a footing with good society, his fortune thenceforth would be secure. But how, in the name of Beelzebub, was that word of introduction to be had?

The game proceeded with varying results, only the stakes became higher and higher. All at once Sam had a sensation. Unless his eyes deceived him, he had seen his man perform precisely the trick which Sam knew to be his own private invention. He rose quietly from his table and walked to the door of the inner room, when a glance at the cards convinced him that he had not been mistaken. The latest and strangest coincidence had taken place, and it had brought their long correspondent careers finally into collision. Sam returned to his table, drank off his brandy, again returned to the private room, and entered it boldly. He knew, and did not let slip, his opportunity.

The play was over; the four gentlemen were standing up, talking and laughing, the winner carelessly folding up and placing in his pocket-book a dozen or so of hundred-thaler bank-notes. Sam took him familiarly by the arm and grasped his hand.

"Act as if you knew me," said he in English. "I saw you do that trick. You have three prepared cards in your pocket. I can have you searched here before everybody, and kicked out of society. I'll do it, unless you present me to all these

men as your particular friend, Mr. Flint. Come now!"

The man, upon perceiving Sam's drift, partially recovered his disturbed equanimity, and shook hands with simulated cordiality. The ceremony of presentation was then punctiliously performed, and the disreputable half-breed was a member of the best society. After the usual compliments had passed, Sam bade his sponsor enlarge upon their early intimacy, and allude to him as a young gentleman of vast wealth and highly connected. The command was obeyed, and, as in a fairy tale, the beggar was transformed into a prince. The Baron von Stecknadeln invited him to dine; Kriegsrath Pickelhaube hoped to be honoured by his presence at the reception on Sunday evening; the banker Groschenlieb would feel hurt if he did not drop in at his reading-rooms the next morning. Mr. Flint gravely bowed his acknowledgments. Before the company separated, he turned again to his involuntary benefactor and requested him for his card, remarking that he must make a note of his address. It was given accordingly, and Sam read upon it the name of Mr. Golightley Urmson.

In a few minutes more they were alone.

"I want six hundred thalers," said Mr. Flint.

"You may go to the devil," said Mr. Golightley Urmson.

"Come now, we'd better be friends, Mr. Urmson.

You're all right for this time, but you'll be wanting to play that same game again some day, and then I'll be there, you depend. No use, Mr. Urmson, old boy! You're no better than I am, 'nd you needn't pretend to be. Come now, I don't want to hurt you; 'f I get something to start on, I'll do the rest for myself. Or we'll make a pair of us, if you like, 'nd do business together. Six hundred thalers, old boy! You wouldn't want me to discredit your introduction, would you?"

Mr. Golightley Urmson straightened himself, curled forward his side-locks, and made his tinted eyeglasses glisten overawingly. He explained that he was not what Mr. Flint took him for; that this had been the first and would be the last time he ever cheated at cards; that he had done it only to relieve a temporary embarrassment, and that so soon as his remittances arrived he intended giving the gentlemen their revenge. "You are an impudent rogue," he added; "but you happened to detect me in an action which I regret, and I am willing to regard your impudence as a timely retribution for my —ah—fault. I don't mind giving you some money as a free gift—a self-inflicted penance. Understand, I am not in the least danger from you, nor would I consent to be intimidated if I were. This is a free —ah—contribution." Here the orator magnificently drew forth his pocket-book, took out of it with the tips of his long fingers a fold of bank-notes, and,

averting his eyes, held them superciliously toward Mr. Flint. "Now go to the devil," he repeated, turning away.

"Now you look here, old boy," said the other, stepping quickly in front of him; "I know you 'nd all about you. I know what part of New Hampshire your remittances come from, and who sends 'em. I've watched you for five years 'nd more. You're no better than I am, except for luck. I knew we'd be even some day, whether I went up or you went down. You've kept up very nicely, haven't you, and know all the fine people? Very well. I'm even with you now, and if I go down, you'll go with me. The same devil for us both, old boy! I shall do all right without you for a while; but if I ever get in any scrape, I shall use your name to get out of it again. Maybe it'll get worn out sooner with both of us using it, but it'll be worn out for you 's well as for me. So maybe you'll want to keep me out of scrapes—what?"

"I can not consent to be intimidated," Golightley repeated, still fingering his side-locks with an air of superiority, and beginning to walk off. Mr. Flint allowed him to get some distance away, and then called after him, in a tone so loud as to attract the notice of every one in the *café*, "Hi! Urmson, hold on!"

Golightley looked over his shoulder and paused. "Something wrong about this money," called Mr.

Flint, not moving from his easy position on the end of the table, and shaking the notes in the air. "You've cheated me out of——"

Golightley came hastily back. Mr. Flint had spoken in German, and the tenor of his remarks did not promise to be such as the public ought to be made privy to. Golightley came up pale and a little tremulous, either with fury or, despite his disclaimer, with fury mingled with fear. Mr. Flint ducked down his head and laughed. "There's only five hundred here," explained he, so soon as he had recovered his gravity. "Come on now—another hundred, old boy!"

The other hesitated. No doubt that, for a moment or two, he meditated rebellion at whatever cost. He looked into Mr. Flint's keen black eyes, and knew that he had to deal with a man more unprincipled and more desperate than himself—a man who had gained a most unlucky advantage over him, and who, moreover, had in some inexplicable manner become possessed of a knowledge concerning himself and his private affairs which already went far enough, and might, for all Golightley knew, extend much further. Of Mr. Flint, on the other hand, Golightley knew nothing; but, as he looked at him, he fancied he recollected having met with that swarthy, sinister, impenetrable face often before; it had haunted him for years past, like an evil genius, and now, at last, had

fastened its ugly hold upon him. To defy an unknown, unscrupulous, hostile power like this was certainly rash, and might be fatal; nevertheless, the momentary impulse to do so was almost irresistible. A man's freedom, when it is first threatened, seems better worth preserving than honour, reputation, wealth, or any other thing. Yet it so happens that in perhaps nine cases out of ten, freedom is sacrificed in the end. In the present instance Golightley had greatly weakened his position by yielding to Mr. Flint's first approaches: had he resisted from the outset, all might have been well; but he had been taken too utterly by surprise to weigh the matter, and the first demands made upon him had seemed to be such as it could do no great harm to grant. By so doing, however, he had crippled his independence, and to retrieve it now might be ruin. He hesitated for nearly a minute, while Mr. Flint silently but guardedly watched him. It is hardly too much to say that during these few seconds Golightley suffered as much anguish of mind as it was within his scope to feel. Suddenly drops of sweat started out on his forehead and ran down into his beard. He hastily took out his pocket-book, thrust the note into Mr. Flint's hand, and hurried away. The strength seemed to have slid out of him. He stumbled once or twice before reaching the street, and did not keep his chin uplifted as usual.

Such, in effect, is the version of this occurrence which Sam confided to Nikomis. Perhaps he exaggerated the ease and completeness of his own victory, and under-stated the prowess of his antagonist; yet there can be little question that the final result of the contest was much as he represented it to be. At all events, his worldly standing underwent a transformation forthwith. He rose at once to the higher social strata. His Indian strain rather helped him than the contrary in his intercourse with polite circles: his foreign appearance was a distinction, the more because no one knew from what nationality he sprang; and he had tact enough, and a sufficient smattering of languages, to satisfy tolerably well the demands of fashionable society. He lived by his wits as before, but the opportunities and the gains were far greater; and he used so much caution in his operations as for the most part to escape even suspicion. With Golightley he wisely interfered as seldom as possible; although, whenever his own resources waned, he never hesitated to demand, or failed to receive, assistance. By degrees the relations of the two men became less hostile; they drifted into a half-explicit partnership. Either Golightley's moral fibre continued to deteriorate, or he tacitly confessed himself a greater rogue than he had at first pretended. Be that as it may, he accepted Mr. Flint's co-operation in several shady strokes of business. But the more closely

their actual interests were identified, the further did they retire from visible intimacy. The breadth of Europe was more often between them than not; when necessary, they corresponded through the post, and once in a while they had an interview. Life went on with them pretty comfortably, and Mr. Flint at least greatly enjoyed himself. His physical accomplishments aided to render him somewhat conspicuous: as a horseman, a hunter, and a swordsman he was in high repute; and once, after skating before Czar Nicholas of Russia, that potentate personally expressed to him his satisfaction, and gave him a diamond ring, which Sam still retained—less, perhaps, out of sentiment than as a resource in the hour of adversity.

"Why you make look so poor now, Sam?" demanded Nikomis, at this point, recurring to the question which had puzzled her at the outset; since, for all he had said thus far, there seemed no reason why her grandson should not be as affluent as at any period of his career.

"Oh, well, granny, Golightley's here, isn't he? S' long as he's rich, I sha'n't stay so very poor—he! he! he! Madge says he's going to be married, and I s'pose," added Sam humorously, "he'll like having me best man at his wedding."

"You seen Madge?" asked Nikomis, a little jealously.

"Seen her this morning; mighty pretty girl she

is now, granny—mighty nice! She told me something I didn't know before," he continued, after a pause, throwing a sharp glance at the old woman. "I knew who your daughter-in-law was before, granny; but you never told me how kind my grandpa had been to me—what? Oh no, I'm not so very poor, after all, granny."

"What you going to do with Madge?" asked Nikomis, passing over these allusions.

"What d' you want me to do?"

"Ugh! marry her," said Nikomis.

Sam knocked the ashes out of his pipe and laughed silently to himself. "She mighty pretty girl, granny," was all his reply. After refilling and lighting his pipe, he said: "Old Golightley's got ahead of me this time. They can't touch him till they've caught me. No evidence against him, 'less I give it. Tell you what, though, I don't care. I spent all my share, 'nd if they track me down, I'll peach on him. Damn him, he had more 'n half the money, anyway, 'nd I'll do it, 'less he gives me half what he's got."

"You stolen money, Sam?—stolen money right out? Whose money—um?"

"What you looking so glum about, granny?" returned Sam, with a passing scowl. "What do you care whose money it was? It was Golightley's stealing, anyway; he put me up to it, 'nd then covered all his own tracks, curse him!"

"Nikomis sorry you a thief, Sam," said the old squaw, with a grim solemnity of manner different from her hitherto submissive and fond demeanour. "Nikomis never been a thief. You might have had my money. Me sorry you come here 'fraid to show yourself. Nikomis never 'fraid to show myself."

"Never mind, granny, Garth 'nd Cuthbert can't deny the legacy—that's safe, anyway."

"Don't know 'bout that," said Nikomis, shaking her head. "Maybe Golightley spent all that. Besides, how you going to make show it's yours?"

"You've got the papers, haven't you, to prove who I am?" exclaimed Sam, jerking himself suddenly up on his elbow. "Damn you, you haven't lost them? Madge said you had 'em. Come now, granny, no nonsense!"

"Ugh! Madge. You better ask her for 'em then," retorted the Indian, with a gleam of sullen resentment. "Maybe she got 'em."

"By the devil, you old hag," said Sam, sitting up with a threatening look; "didn't I tell you, no nonsense? What you done with those papers now? I want 'em."

"You cut my heart out, Sam," was Nikomis's reply, sitting grimly impassive before him. "Maybe you find the papers inside me."

The other threw himself back on his mattress with something between a snarl and a snicker. Plainly his grandparent was not to be intimidated, and since she alone could establish his claim to the

Eve legacy, he had made a mistake in trying to bully her. She must be cajoled into good humour; though as to the probable cause of her sudden perversity, Sam was quite in the dark.

And, indeed, such waywardness might well appear singular. During many years Sam had been the old woman's hero. She had seen in him the instrument of retribution upon the traditional enemies of her tribe. In his absence she had adorned him with every stern or subtle quality that answered in her savage code for virtues, and had looked forward to his return as to the proud consummation of her life; she was no squeamish moralist, and her decalogue had little in common with the Mosaic one. Nevertheless she owned her prejudices, and next to cowardice disdained vulgar theft. A man might conquer men by open violence, or by superior craft if force were unavailing; but tamely to steal was beneath the dignity of a true Indian, descendant of mighty sachems.

In short, deep-seated and long-suffering though Nikomis's affection was, it could not stand the strain of her contempt: and Sam's shameless avowal of his shame had fortified her scorn. Moreover, the thought that enriching him meant impoverishing the Urmsons bore weightily against him. For, although theoretically hostile towards Garth and his father, their charitable and kindly conduct towards her throughout the past years had not been without effect; insomuch that at this crisis she found her-

self, not a little to her own surprise, taking their part against her grandson and herself. It was a strange transformation, albeit by the logic of circumstances inevitable. Revenge, if put off too long, is apt to become an irksome affair, the realisation of which would bring more disaster than its defeat. Yet it might be rash to credit Nikomis, on the strength of her quarrel with Sam, with an abandonment of all sinister designs against the Urmsons. Her nature was a dark and involved one, and she was probably capable of shielding her foe from an unworthy tomahawk, only in order to butcher him herself with proper respect afterwards.

Meanwhile, before Sam could reopen the conversation upon a more conciliatory basis, Elinor's knock at the outer door of the house put an end to the interview for the time being. Nikomis, who supposed the visitor to be Mrs. Tenterden, prepared to go down; and the half-breed, with his pipe still between his teeth, turned on his side and composed himself for a nap. Nikomis, at the door of the wigwam, turned round, with the flap in her hand, and looked within. There lay Sam, the darkest object in the darkness, as he was the least heroic in her regard. With a grunt the old Indian let the flap fall over the opening, and so made the darkness uniform and complete. Then she turned away and slowly hobbled down the garret stairs. She had blotted her grandson out.

CHAPTER LXII.

MADGE'S VICISSITUDES.

ALTHOUGH Nikomis had opposed a tolerably impassive front towards her degenerate grandson, her heart was secretly bitter with its unsunned wrath, and she retired in a mood to avenge herself upon friend and foe alike. Had she, at this juncture, encountered Mrs. Tenterden instead of Elinor, the former's constitutional timidity and want of tact, acting upon the sardonic and exasperated temper of the Indian, might easily have brought on a catastrophe. But after her brief and vehement altercation with the younger lady, the old witch withdrew in a state of such composure as often results from the meeting together of two strenuous mental atmospheres. Yet the storm may have been rather postponed than dissipated, the exciting causes remaining. Nikomis might yet find occasion to relieve her soul.

Madge, after her interview with Sam in the small hours of the morning, had returned to her chamber glowing with pleasurable excitement. Lying upon her bed, her hands clasped between her cheek and the pillow, and her dark sparkling eyes looking into the darkness, she had meditated until dawn. At an early hour she left the house and betook herself to Urmhurst, which she entered noiselessly by the kitchen door. A few minutes afterwards she was standing (as Sam had stood two or three hours before, and as Selwyn was to do not long afterwards) by Cuthbert's bedside.

"He looks dead," she thought to herself. "What if he and Garth were dead—it's all so silent here!" She shook her head. "I shouldn't like it; I don't want it to be so. Death is disgusting; besides, then everything would happen because there was no help for it, and there would be no chance of changing one's mind, nor of having one's way in spite of difficulty. I like uncertainty. I would not murder anybody; death is hateful; but for death the world would be good, because there'd be time enough for every one to get what they wanted out of life. No one is really wicked—only some have to do more in order to enjoy themselves than others. If Mr. Urmson, for instance, wanted to do all I mean to do, he'd have to be more wicked than I expect to be. But he is clever! he's the only man who ever came near understanding me. If my poor Garth were half so keen——"

As the thought of Garth entered her mind, she slowly moved toward his chamber; but on reaching the door she opened it brusquely. The face upon the pillow lay with its hollow, half-opened eyes turned towards her, while the lips moved in indistinct mutterings. Madge's warm brilliant visage at first expressed aversion, but soon curiosity seemed to become dominant. She drew near and laid her white hand, firm and tenacious despite its softness and dimples, on Garth's bony wrist, and tried to catch his unrecognising eye with her own.

"What an unlucky fellow he is!" ran her thoughts; "I wish he were not; but that has always been the trouble with him. I could never get on with unlucky people, because I don't mean to be unlucky myself. I wish disagreeable people might be the only unfortunate ones, and all the agreeable, lucky! See what a man Garth is, in spite of his troubles! Any one else would look effeminate and silly after such an illness, but he seems only older and manlier. I like that coarse black beard. He suits me—Garth, you suit me, on the whole, better than any one else. Why won't you be what I want you to be? But you won't, and if you did I suppose it would spoil you somehow—how provoking! I love him for not being what he must be if I'm to marry him! Dear me! what will become of me? I wish I knew what had

become of some woman who was like me, and had felt as I do when she was a girl. . . . People here will be surprised when they hear of me, years from now—shocked, too, I suppose." She laughed under her breath, stroking Garth's unresponsive hand with hers.

"And what will you think, my Garth?" she whispered, bending over him. "O Garth, you mustn't die! I shouldn't half enjoy anything afterwards—I should be thinking that perhaps I might have been happier with you. And so I should be—if there weren't so many ways of being happy! I should like to try them all, and then come back to him. No—dear me! I don't know what I do most want, and that's the worst of it. I don't want Golightley; and Sam . . ." She rested her forefinger on her smooth cheek and meditated for several moments. Suddenly rousing herself, she drew a long breath, glanced towards the door, and then crouched down till her face was on a level with her lover's, and his feverish breath mingled with hers.

"Never mind about Sam, Garth dear," she whispered. "You are the best, no matter what happens. They may say I don't love you—but feel this, dear!" She pressed her mouth to his parched lips, and more than one heart-beat passed ere she removed it. "Do you think I would have done that for Sam?" she asked, smiling. "Have you

poisoned me, my Garth?" Again she kissed him, deliberately as before, and afterwards yet a third time. "Shall I have the fever and die? Let them say I didn't love you now, if they dare!" She sprang to her feet. "Good-bye, Garth," she said, waving her hand, her face and figure radiant with life. "If I have poison on my lips,—Sam shall be poisoned too! and you won't be jealous, will you?"

From Garth's chamber Madge descended to the kitchen, and building up a fire there, proceeded to cook herself a comfortable breakfast. By the time this was eaten it was nearly ten o'clock, and she was preparing to go upstairs to the wigwam when the sound of knocking at the outside door made her pause, and conceal herself in the alcove: for she did not wish her presence at Urmhurst to be known just at present to Mrs. Tenterden (whom she supposed the new arrival to be). But when, after entering the house, Elinor walked into the kitchen with her violin under her arm, Madge in her surprise stepped on a creaking board, and Elinor's eyes at once turned in the direction of the sound. The next moment, however, all risk of discovery was over; Elinor left the kitchen and went upstairs. Madge listened, and soon heard the sound of voices in dispute; then ensued a silence; and finally the old Indian came hobbling down and was received by Madge with an engaging smile.

The two exchanged a few words together—affable on Madge's part and sulky on that of Nikomis—and then the former made her way to the garret. As she passed Garth's door, the sound of music from within made her pause a moment. What right had Elinor to play to Garth? Madge had never yet found occasion to be jealous, but it did now occur to her that here was an infringement of her proprietorship. Should she go in and protest? No—she desired no present outbreak with Elinor; moreover, to assert exclusive rights over her lover would tend to cripple her freedom of action. She passed on, therefore; but the episode had its effect; a woman like Madge knows how to use a provocation both as a handle against an opponent, and as a justification of wider liberties on her own part.

"Come in, Madge," said Sam with a yawn, rolling himself over on the mattress at the summons of her voice at the wigwam entrance. "Come in—all at home!"

"Come outside immediately, Sam Kineo," retorted she with dignity. "I wish to speak with you."

"By the devil, you can order a chap round!" muttered he, crawling out on his hands and knees and looking up at her. "Hi! she is a beauty, sure enough."

"That 'll do for compliments," said Madge in a tone of decision: "and be so kind as to use proper

language when you speak to me. Are those your best clothes?"

"Good enough to lie in a garret with, aren't they? I've better in the box when the time comes."

"I wish you to come to the village with me this afternoon, and be introduced to everybody: so you had better put them on soon."

Sam chuckled sardonically. "I think I won't appear in society this afternoon, thank you," said he. "Some people might be too glad to see me."

"Afraid of the police!" exclaimed Madge scornfully; and added, with a favourite phrase of hers, "if I were a man I'd never be afraid or ashamed to face anybody."

"Oh, you can talk about police; but how is a chap to face the United States army?" demanded Sam, sulkily.

"If you'd had any sense, Sam Kineo, you would have got all you wanted without interfering with the law at all."

"Gently now, Madge, that's a little dear. If you'd been with me, it would ha' been all right, no doubt; but you wouldn't come when I asked you."

"What do you mean? I am to marry Garth Urmson. I've nothing to do with you."

"Marry Garth—eh? curse him! If you'd said that last night, I'd have cut his heart out for him this morning."

Madge laughed. "You haven't forgotten how he thrashed you when you were boys. But you mustn't think I'm as foolish as I was in those days. Do you suppose I'd run away with an escaped robber when I might stay at home and marry a prosperous artist?"

The half-breed fastened his narrow level glance on the young woman's blooming face. "You look here now," muttered he, "I'm not so foolish now as then, either. You've fooled me twice in my life, and that's enough. You may call me an escaped robber, but I'll be an escaped something else before I'll see you and Garth come together!"

Madge drew nearer her companion and rested her hand on his arm. "What fun!" said she. "It's quite romantic to hear you talk that way. Do it some more, won't you?"

"No need of that," returned the half-breed. "You know what I mean."

"How stupid you are! I thought you would be at least as entertaining as Golightley; but he is ever so much better than you are."

"Golightley Urmson is no better than I am," returned Sam moodily; "and I'll make him feel it before I'm done with him. Maybe you didn't know that he and I were pals?"

Though there were few things which Madge knew better than this, she chose to express proper surprise, and so drew from Sam the same story

which he had just told Nikomis, together with some further particulars which Nikomis had not heard. An hour or two passed away in the narration, when it was interrupted by a loud summons rapped out upon the house-door below.

"That sounds like a policeman!" exclaimed Madge maliciously.

She rose as she spoke; but to her astonishment Sam caught her wrist and violently dragged her down again. "If that's the police," whispered he between his teeth, "it's a bad day for you, Madge Danver!"

"I hope it is the police," she cried passionately, struggling to free her wrist.

By a rapid movement, Sam pinioned the girl, and pushed her back against the hand-organ box. She struggled desperately, and being exceedingly strong for a woman, would probably have escaped from a man less powerful than Kineo. But he gripped her like a vice, and his fingers sank deep into the firm flesh of her arms. At length, with short breath and cheeks afire, she gasped, "If you don't loose me, I'll scream."

"Then I'll cut your throat," he hissed in her ear. "Curse you, I can hate easier than love you. You little jade! think you could bully me?"

"Sam, let me go!"

He gripped her tighter and snickered. "Want to marry dear Garth, do you? You little liar! How'd

you like to see that pretty scalp of yours hanging there with the others—eh ?"

"Sam—I'll never be false to you."

"Wait till I cut your throat, my little dear—then I might trust you. Think I forgot how you lied about me to Garth ten years ago ? I'd not trust you out of reach of my knife for all Golightley's money and mother Eve's legacy put together !"

"What have I done ?"

"We'll see, my little dear. If you've set the police on me . . . . hush !"

Madge Danver, full of life as she was, would rather have died than endure the suspense of the minute that followed. A man's step, resolute and vigorous, was audible on the lower flight of stairs. Who could it be ? Had some hideous fatality actually brought the police to the house, at this moment of all others ? If that vigorous step kept on up the garret stairs, Sam would murder her, in the belief that she was an accomplice against him. He held her rigidly down, though she had ceased struggling, and they were both listening intently. As she lay there, her memory reviewed all her past relations with this man, and she fancied that beneath her uniformly arrogant bearing towards him, she had always harboured a secret fear—nay, had even foreseen the present crisis, and herself at his mercy. She was conquered, perhaps in the only way that such a woman could be conquered, by

sheer physical force and brutality. And as she panted in the grasp of the man who had conquered her, and who might the next moment become her murderer, she felt a strange and new satisfaction in him. He was the incarnation of power, irresponsible and irresistible; and he could not have hit upon a better way of wooing this wayward creature. She might be quicker-witted than he, but his muscles had forced her to the brink of eternity, and the superiority was a real and substantial one.

Meantime the steps had paused on the bed-room floor, and there was a low murmur of voices. Was the officer showing a search warrant, and demanding information? As the two strained their ears to listen, it suddenly came into Madge's mind that of course the enigmatic stranger could be none other than Jack Selwyn. Instantly the painful tension of her mind and body relaxed, she broke into a faint tremulous laugh, and murmuring, "It's all right, Sam—I'm so glad!" her head drooped over sideways, and she fainted away.

CHAPTER LXIII.

POISON.

SAM loosed his victim with a grunt of surprise, and saw her topple over towards the right and lie limp and insensible on the floor. Before he could make up his mind what to do next, Nikomis had entered. At sight of Madge she stopped short; then fixed her eyes on Sam. "You fool!" she exclaimed gutturally, "you killed her?"

"Not I!" replied the half-breed; "she's fainted, that's all. Who came?"

"No one t' hurt you," grunted the Indian, stooping over the girl.

It was not long before Madge began to gasp and sigh, and the colour to flow back to lips and cheek. Anon she upraised herself giddily on one arm, and put her other hand over her heart, afterwards holding up the fingers, as if to see whether they were bloody.

"I thought you had stabbed me," she murmured with a shudder.

Sam felt ill at ease; the glow of his ferocity had cooled, and it did not occur to him that Madge could be free from resentment at his treatment of her. He had probably been carried beyond his original intention by mere savage excitement; but he was alarmed to think how narrowly he had missed committing a crime objectless in itself and sure to have been fatally disastrous to him.

"Come, now, forgive and forget!" said he, sitting down by Madge, and assuming his most agreeable manner. "What's the use of you and me bearing malice, Madge?"

Madge gazed at him thoughtfully for a while, saying at last with a sigh, "You are a real devil, Sam, aren't you?—No, don't mind my saying it. I think a real devil is what I need. I shall never forget how you looked. . . ." Here she shuddered again. "No one but you would have treated me so—I am so beautiful. Any one else would have relented. But what can you be made of?"

"Flesh and blood, ain't I?"

"Well, perhaps!" She eyed him curiously. "Can you really be my hero! I ought to hate you. It isn't quite pleasant to have been conquered, after all."

"Oh, I wouldn't have hurt you," affirmed Sam, re-assuringly.

There was a gleam in the young woman's eyes as she answered: "If I believed that I would despise you as well as hate you. But it's false; you meant to do it!" She raised her hand and laid it on his shoulder appealingly. "Don't you disappoint me, too! I have tried so many things; I'm tired. Don't speak any more about it; you don't understand me; you'd only say something stupid."

It was true that Madge was a mystery to the half-breed; yet he was shrewd enough to perceive that his violence had somehow not wholly displeased her. Perhaps the right way to win a woman's heart was to threaten it with a bowie-knife. However evil are a man's deeds, he may generally be persuaded that some involuntary virtue is mixed up with them; and however bad he may be, the virtuous persuasion flatters him.

"It was Jack Selwyn who came," remarked Madge, after a pause. "A friend of Garth's; they were in Europe together. Did you never meet him?"

"Selwyn?—hold on! a slender, sharp-eyed chap, always dressed well? By the devil, shouldn't wonder if I did know him, after all! Selwyn. You knew he was going to be here—eh?"

"Yes. Does he know you by sight?"

"Not he! knows Golightley though; Golightley thought he suspected something."

"At all events Selwyn knows all about the

robbery, and I think he's after you." She was speaking in a faint, listless tone, and Sam sat motionless, his dark face set in malevolent abstraction. Nikomis had retired into the wigwam some time before, and both Madge and Sam had forgotten her.

"Think he's brought any one with him?" inquired the half-breed after a while.

Madge shook her head.

Sam reflected a minute and then asked, "How did you come to know 'bout this affair of ours before I told you?"

"From Mrs. Tenterden, and from Golightley, and from a letter," replied Madge nonchalantly. Then, noticing Sam's surprise, she added with a smile, "The letter was from Jack Selwyn."

"He writes to you—eh?" hissed the other, with a momentary return of the savage.

The young woman smiled again, somewhat defiantly.

"Got him after you, too, eh?—by the devil! How does he begin, then?—'Madge dearest,' or 'My sweet mistress,' or what is it—eh?"

"Ah!" cried Madge angrily; for a woman will endure bullying far more submissively than coarseness. "If you know how it began, you may find out what was in it!"

Perceiving that he had made a mistake, Sam would again have attempted an apology; but Madge

impatiently stopped him. "Never mind—never mind. The letter was written to Garth, but I read it, without Garth's knowing."

"I see!" nodded the other with a glance of crafty significance. "You . . . eh."

"I found it in the woods," said Madge hastily.

Sam still nodded significantly, as much as to say that the finding was wonderfully opportune. "So Selwyn's the chap 's been tracking me down!" he muttered presently. "Did you show this letter to Golightley?"

"No—nor to any one else. Don't suspect me, Sam; if I chose to deceive you, I could do it without your suspecting. I didn't wish to frighten Uncle Golightley away, nor to let him know how much I knew about him. But you can do me neither good nor harm—except bodily harm."

"There was a sincerity in her tone which was pathetic, because, in her, it betrayed so much inward stress; and Kineo could not but feel some sense of her forgiving disposition towards him. "I've been shabby to you, my little beauty," said he, "and I'm sorry for it—by the devil I am! Tell you what, Madge, if you 'nd me pull together we can fool Jack Selwyn 'nd all his gang. Just you get round Selwyn 'nd find out how much he knows, and if he suspects I'm here, just throw him off the scent—d'ye see? You've got brains, 'nd if you do the best you can for me, I'm satisfied."

"I should think you might be, Sam Kineo," she answered quietly. "But what shall I get in return for it? How can you help me? Uncle Golightley is too clever for you. If he marries Elinor, don't you see he's sure of the money whether he's found out or not."

"Not a bad notion—marrying the woman you've robbed!" assented the other. "We ought to stop that off, somehow."

"When do you mean to see Golightley?"

"Oh, soon enough. And look here, Madge Danver—if that chap Selwyn's in love with Elinor as well, he'd bear easy on the man that could prove his rival a thief—eh?"

"What do you think of me?" asked Madge abruptly.

"Sweetest piece of flesh ever I came across! what more d' you want?"

She gave a short hard laugh. "Nothing, I suppose.—But I mean, you seem to think I would stop at nothing. I've never done anything very wicked, yet."

The half-breed ducked his head in noiseless cachinnation. "Yes—you look innocent enough, 'nd that's the wickedest part of you. I know you—you love devilry just for its own sake, 'nd you can't keep your fingers out of it."

"It isn't true!" cried Madge, getting to her feet excitedly. "I like good people and good things—only——"

Sam had risen too, and catching her hands in his, he peered with a penetrating grimace into her eyes. "No you don't—no you don't—no you don't!" he repeated, shaking his head slowly. "No use, my little dear; should have liked good things before that picnic that you and I and Garth went to. Too late now—the devil's got you—better give in to him!"

She flushed, and tears filled her eyes; then she grew pale and smiled. Immediately Sam threw his arm round her waist and kissed her, not reverently, upon the mouth; kissed those lips which were poisoned now, if never before.

She partly freed herself from him, and at the same moment they both, by a common impulse, looked towards the opening of the wigwam. There appeared the grotesque visage of Nikomis, swarthy and framed in darkness: and her black eyes seemed to gleam approval of what had been done.

CHAPTER LXIV.

COUNTERMINING.

THE arrival of Golightley and Professor Grindle, shortly after the episode just described, brought to an end that parallel movement of events whose progress has been indicated from the earliest hours of the morning. Madge returned with Elinor to the village in the afternoon, and Selwyn undertook the care of his friend Garth during the ensuing night.

The next morning Professor Grindle, finding Garth still on the mending hand, bade farewell to the household and set off through the woods to the village. It was a grey cold day, and the Professor resentfully anticipated an early and severe winter. "The young folks will enjoy it, no doubt," muttered he, as he gathered his old-fashioned top-coat more closely about him, and stepped sturdily along the frost-hardened pathway; "but after a fellow gets

to be forty, he should move a degree nearer to the equator every year, and allow the sun to restore the caloric which old age takes away. I don't know, though; if all the grey-beards lived in the south, and left the youths and maidens to their own devices up north, the world would go to rack and ruin very soon. Ay, and what would we poor duffers do without them, to remind us of what we once were, or hoped to be!—Hullo! there she is."

At the end of a long leafless vista an erect and slender figure, equipped in fur-lined jacket and muff, had come into view. As they neared each other, the old gentleman lifted his hat, exposing his bald pate to the icy breeze, while Elinor, whose face was pink with cold and exercise, smiled and became pinker still.

"Good-morning, young lady," he called out in his strident, kindly tones; "I wish I had such a nice muff to keep my old fingers warm! May I ask your permission to walk back a little distance and chat with you?"

"I'd rather go with you, Professor Grindle, if you don't mind," replied she, turning. "How are your patients?"

"Garth 'll get well; Cuthbert won't," said Grindle sternly.

"I know Mr. Urmson very little, I suppose," said Elinor after a pause; "but I can't help feeling that I love him."

"Ay, ay, Cuthbert stands high in our Yankee peerage, as an honest, enlightened, tender-hearted man. May his son prove worthy of him—I think he will."

"They are very unlike," was all Elinor's answer.

"Ay, that they are. Well, young lady, like or unlike, I leave them in your care. I've left all necessary prescriptions in writing, but you don't need to be told what the errands of mercy are."

"Thank you, Professor Grindle. I've never been useful to anybody; I shall be glad if you will teach me how to begin." This was said with earnestness, tempered only by the reserve which rendered most of Elinor's utterances apparently mere society-talk. But Grindle, in addition to his native penetration, had heard enough about Miss Golightley during the past twenty-four hours to enable him to estimate her more accurately than most of her acquaintances. There was a cordial glow in his resolute old eyes as he looked upon her.

"You'll give the sick people music from time to time," said he. "Harmony and melody are valuable commodities in this world, and those who can produce them deserve the world's thanks."

"I like to think that music may do more than merely amuse people," remarked Elinor, looking up shyly.

"Urmhurst is a fine field for a purveyor of harmony, just now, my dear young lady. You appre-

hend me—I don't speak strictly by the letter. Your violin is the symbol of something deeper and better."

"But you must not think that I am like my music; I have no such power."

"Well, well, we'll not quarrel about that," said Grindle smiling. "Now, you'll pardon me if, in speaking of our patients, I take you a bit into the family confidence—and after all, you know, you're a cousin. Cuthbert is a man who cannot live long; but peace of mind, though it won't cure him, is his best medicine: and I find that this match between Garth and Maggie Danver causes him great anxiety—he thinks they don't really care for each other."

"Does Mr. Urmson wish me to hear this, sir?"

"Telling you of it is my own idea entirely. 'Tis the old story, you perceive, of a boy and girl falling in love, and growing up to repent it, and yet, for one cause or another, failing to break it off. Now, interference in these affairs, unless delicately managed, is quite as apt to tighten the knot as to loosen it. An honourable man, so long as he believes his mistress true to him, would chop his right hand off sooner than deny her. But if there were evidence that she wasn't true—the case would be altered. Are you intimate with Madge Danver, Miss Elinor?"

The intonation given to these words explained their significance. Elinor flushed suddenly. "I had rather not have suspicions," said she.

Grindle gave a grimly humorous smile. "Wrong should not be suffered, my dear young lady," said he, "through disinclination on the part of honest people to take counsel against it."

"I think we are more apt to wish our suspicions true than to find them so," returned Elinor shrinkingly.

"Ay, ay," assented Grindle, with his uncompromising nod. "But should the career of a young fellow who might do good in the world be spoilt by the selfishness of a pretty girl, who, however she may wish her own advantage, would most likely ruin him without securing it?"

Elinor took one hand from her muff and let both hands fall at her sides; her figure drooped, and the light faded from her eyes. Grindle, looking at her, had a new impression of her personality. Her face had a charm easily missed by an unsympathetic observer, but which, once recognised, was fascinating for ever after. It was a face in which nobleness and severity were singularly blended with tender human irregularity: it contained a discord analogous to that by which great composers elicit their most poignant harmonies. She had spent her life without finding a fit opportunity for parting asunder the veil which hid her inward ardour and impetuosity. Professor Grindle half doubted whether he would be justified in urging these latent forces into action.

To cut a leash is a less revocable proceeding than to apply a spur.

"What right have I to meddle between them?" she demanded at last.

"The universal human right to support a good cause," answered the Professor with great gentleness. "Besides, there's no one to take your place. Cuthbert has begun to stagger under his responsibility: your young shoulders may relieve him, if you will. You are a heroine, Miss Elinor, if you'll let yourself be one."

"I'm afraid I could not be impartial," said she.

"Glad to hear it!" cried Grindle heartily. "Be heart and soul on the right side, and don't mind about giving quarter till all's over. And now I've said all I need say, Miss Elinor, so I'll only add Good-bye." He stopped and held out his hand; Elinor putting her own frankly within it.

"I'm glad we met, Professor Grindle," said she, with a smile and a look that made the hackneyed phrase valuable.

"God bless her!" muttered Grindle, more than once, as he tramped towards the village. "I might have had a daughter like her!"

When Elinor came in view of Urmhurst she saw a gentleman with a cigar in his mouth approaching from the direction of the farmyard. He was sauntering meditatively along, holding his cane

behind his back with both hands, except when, from time to time, he took the cigar from beneath his moustache and filliped away the white ash. He did not seem aware of Elinor's approach, and she had leisure to remark the slender, vigorous grace of his figure, the manly, keen-eyed comeliness of his face, and even the excellent fit and good taste of his apparel. The shadows of life seemed to abate somewhat of their gloom in view of this handsome, energetic and independent young fellow, who could dress so well and puff his cigar so composedly through them all.

As he caught sight of her he took off his fur cap and made a bow—gracefully enough this time—and exclaimed cheerfully, "Good-morning, Miss Golightley! How's the old lady?"

Elinor smiled in spite of herself at this rather irreverent paraphrase for Mrs. Tenterden; but Jack Selwyn was not like other people, so she only replied that the lady in question was doing rather better.

"That's all right," observed Jack. "Garth had a tip-top night, too, as I know to my cost: he'll be out skating by Christmas. Mr. Urmson's asleep in celebration of his son's convalescence. Golightley's got the dyspepsia from too many buckwheats, and even I have been obliged to smoke an extra cigar and take a run over the farmyard. Ever been in the barn, Miss Golightley?"

"I never was in any barn, I don't think."

"Deuce! wish I might have the luck to introduce you to many a better enjoyment. Come on, and know what you've never known till now!"

She went beside him, smiling occasionally as he chatted about the weather and the country, until he lifted the broad wooden latch and ushered her into the fragrant brown-shadowed interior. He then pulled out the old sleigh to the middle of the floor, and arranged a comfortable seat in it with the buffalo robe.

"This is very jolly," said Elinor: "how good the hay smells; and nothing can be sweeter than cows' breath!"

"O yes, there can!" Jack longed to retort; but he repressed himself, and said instead, "So you like New England savagery? Do you mean to live here?"

"I believe my mother and—Mr. Golightley Urmson think of living in New York."

"To tell the truth and shame the devil, I don't adore Golightley myself, and am not going to congratulate you on his having the right to dispose of you. Are you angry?"

"It's the devil who ought to be offended, I should think," said Elinor, lifting her brows a trifle.

"I hope he may be, before I'm done with him!" muttered Jack, setting his teeth. "Well—but look here: about that money-business of yours."

"Mrs. Tenterden's? she will be very much obliged to you."

"Oh, damn her obligations—no, no! I mean it's very kind of her to let me be of some use. She'll recover probably two-thirds of what was stolen—say eighty thousand pounds."

Elinor sat still and gradually became very pale; the announcement had taken her by surprise, and seemed to produce anything but a pleasant effect upon her. "It's too late now," she said at length, rather bitterly. "All the good things in life wait until you don't need them before they come. What should a girl on the eve of a wealthy marriage want with eighty thousand pounds? But it was very kind of you, Mr. Selwyn."

"Oh, that's all right!" returned Jack very cheerfully. "Yes, Golightley has just about the same sum we hope to recover for you—eighty thousand. Funny, isn't it?"

"Yes," murmured Elinor abstractedly; but all at once she turned and said, "What do you mean?"

"Nothing; only it is funny, you know."

"Where is the man who stole the money?"

"Under surveillance. But it's the accomplice we're after—want to get States' evidence out of him. We believe he's hiding somewhere here abouts."

"States' evidence? Does that mean betraying the other?"

"It's this way. The accomplice has in his possession letters or proofs of some kind, which are necessary to the conviction of—a—the chief scoundrel. And the accomplice has spent all his share of the booty. Therefore, his evidence is worth more to us than his person, and if he'll sell it in consideration of escaping prosecution, we'll agree to the bargain."

"That is, you punish one thief for keeping what he has stolen, and pardon the other for having dissipated his part?"

"Oh, we'll be down on both of them with all the pleasure in the world, if it can be managed," said Jack, smiling.

"Does the principal know that he is under surveillance?"

"Rather imagine not, Miss Golightley."

"He lives openly—isn't hiding, as the accomplice is?"

Jack nodded, not certain whither this swift questioning tended.

"He lives openly—as you and I and Mr. Urmson do—here in our neighbourhood?"

"Hold on! what put his being 'in our neighbourhood' in your head?"

"You said the accomplice was without money, and hiding hereabouts. He could only come here to get money from the principal, and so the principal must be here as well."

"You are deuced clever," said Jack, smiling upon her admiringly. "I must tell you though that it's very evident you know nothing at all about this affair; and since I have charge of it, and it isn't finished yet, I shan't let you know anything."

"I don't wish to be told anything," replied Elinor, with one of her point-blank looks. "But I don't like your consenting to such a piece of meanness."

"Hullo! why, what?"

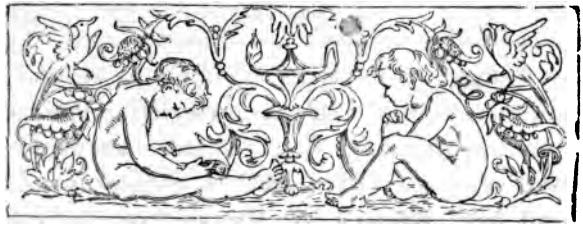
"Encouraging one of these men to betray the other."

"But look here—if we can't touch the chief scamp in any other way——"

"Then don't touch him at all!" exclaimed Elinor, with a glance and a tone that made Jack's eyes sparkle; and rising as she spoke, she bade him good-morning and walked out of the barn, and thus ended the conversation.

"She can't really care for the blackguard, you know," said Jack to himself afterwards, reviewing her words and behaviour. "But does she suspect Golightley of being the blackguard? If not, why take blackguard's part? Hum—why take it any way? As to scruples against States' evidence—inadmissible, of course; though it does seem mean, as she says. What a divine, glorious creature she is, now! Compare her with Madge. By the way, I must make friends with Madge again, and see

whether she can't tell us anything about that accomplice. I wish this damned business was settled, so I might attend to my own! She doesn't care for me yet, but she may at last! God bless her, whether she does or not!"



CHAPTER LXV.

HOUSEWORK.

THE current of affairs at Urmhurst now flowed on with that smoothness vulgarly supposed to be of ill omen. Garth rapidly grew better, but there was a change apparent in him such as may often be noticed in new convalescents, but which generally fades away with the full return of health. To lie in the same bed with death purifies a man, at least for a time. With Garth, an ugly knot seemed to have been loosened at the centre of his spiritual life, setting free his nobler energies.

It was a rule of the sick-chamber that no painful topic should be discussed in it; and thus Garth's bedside became a sort of moral oasis in the midst of a wilderness of conflicting interests and passions. Here did the world put on its most smiling and light-hearted aspect; and if anybody during the

day thought of anything agreeable to be said or done, such word or deed was reserved for the court of his majesty King Convalescent. An unimpassioned observer (were such a monster possible) would have admired the change wrought in the bearing, and seemingly in the very nature, of some half-dozen rational human beings, when they stepped across the threshold of this enchanted chamber. It was analogous to the difference of colours in light and shadow. Garth's august infirmity forbade the impertinence of gloom.

"Nothing like the typhoid for putting a moody, sulky, crack-brained brute of a genius in a good humour," remarked Jack Selwyn to his friend one day. "But hurry up and get well, man, and come out skating, that the world may benefit by your improvement."

"When I go skating, Jack, there'll be an end of this peace and goodwill we're all making so much of. I've not been ill for nothing—and I won't get well for nothing, please God!"

"Oh, damn your holiness! It's because you couldn't help it, in both cases."

Garth laughed.

"Well, what do you think you've been ill for?"

"I did some strange thinking. I imagined I was going through a great spiritual experience. I was in a fight between devils and angels—and what seemed odd, they had the voices of members of the

family and acquaintances! At last, when I was at the very bottom of the pit, I was lifted out by a divine angel of harmony."

"The first sane word you've said yet!" cried Jack. "Elinor Golightley is a divine angel of harmony. The rest is bosh."

"No it isn't," returned Garth. "When a fellow has been knocking about in chaos for what seems thousands of lifetimes, he doesn't come out feeling quite so selfish and impudent as when he went in."

"I think I'll try your recipe, if you haven't patented it. Get my fever, go to bed, dream and gibber my way through chaos for three weeks, and then jump up and prate about my spiritual vicissitudes—and pose as a saint ever afterwards!"

"Confound you, Jack Selwyn, how dare you exasperate me when I'm ill? I'll tell Elinor Golightley!"

"Don't!" cried Jack; "I'd rather you'd punch my head." He tossed the end of his cigar behind the fire, and rested his elbows on his knees. "This has been a jolly fortnight, Garth, old fellow. We'll not see such another soon."

"Where do you suppose we'll be ten years from now?"

"Ten years! Say ten weeks. I'm none of your Parson Graemes, or Methuselahs even!" said Jack, getting impatiently to his feet. "Hark! there comes Miss Golightley with your dinner.

Good-bye; I'm going to the lake to see if the ice bears."

Elinor, having arranged Garth's dinner for him, took up her favourite position by the window, whence she could gaze out upon the frosty sky, and the bleak valley beneath it. This young lady had during the last two weeks become the governing spirit at Urmhurst. For the first time since gentle Martha Urmson's death, Urmhurst had found a mistress. Elinor was by no means averse from taking a human interest in lowly affairs; her scope was broader than that of the mere lady of culture and refinement. And the duties she performed reacted upon herself: she was less frigid and haughty, and her eyes were brighter and her voice cheerier than before her housekeeping began.

"When I was a boy," observed Garth, "my mother handed over the housework to me for nearly a year. I did everything, from sawing wood to making pudding. Do you do as much as that?"

"Almost. You should have seen my hands a week ago: there was a great blister on this finger, and a sore place inside the thumb, and a scald on the wrist. But after all, you know, I have the Danvers' charwoman to help me. She is very amusing. She said yesterday she didn't like scrubbing and rubbing about an old place like this; it was like cleaning and laying out a corpse ready for burial!"

"Is poor old Urmhurst so near its death!" muttered Garth.

"I told you to make you laugh," said Elinor reprovingly. "Another time, when we were brushing the cobwebs from the great beams in the ceilings, she said it was cruel to strip the poor things of their coverings, just when winter was coming on."

"What is Nikomis doing all this time?"

"She is such a strange old creature—she grows stranger every day. Lately she has taken to wearing beads and old feathers, and such things; and once she appeared with her face painted in blue and yellow stripes. She doesn't work herself, but sometimes she watches the charwoman and me with a kind of smile—if you can imagine her smiling!—as if the house were hers and we her servants. And once, when we had gone to put the cellar in order—If you've done your dinner, I'll take the tray out."

"No—I must hear the rest first."

"Well," resumed Elinor, smiling and growing pink, "the amount of it is that we were given to understand that the cellar was her exclusive property, and no one was to trespass in it. For when we got to the bottom of the stairs, she suddenly rose up before us, throwing up her arms and motioning us back. She looked like the spectre of the old sachem that Mr. Urmson says is buried there."

"Yes, there's no telling what awful secrets may

be hidden in that cellar. Have you ever been in her wigwam, up in the garret?"

"No, indeed. But sometimes I hear a rumbling sound, as if she were talking to herself there: and the two tones are quite different; it reminded me of the chanting of the priests in the Roman Catholic churches." Here Elinor took up the tray, and remarking that she must go down and make the coffee, she departed in spite of Garth's expostulations.

It was doubtless fortunate for Elinor that this pressure of alien duties and interests kept her from brooding too much over her own destiny. Her housework gave her wholesome bodily exercise and fatigue, while her mind was busied with the difficult and delicate enterprise of searching for the clue to the problem intrusted to her by Professor Grindle. A main obstacle in the way of success was the necessity of working in silence and unaided. A feminine intuition restrained her from seeking the help of Jack Selwyn, and there were equally good reasons against taking counsel with Cuthbert. For clear-brained and honest though she was, Elinor lacked the authority which wifehood always confers in emergencies of this kind; and in the present instance, her embarrassment was perhaps increased by the fact that the person whose marriage prospects were in jeopardy happened to be Garth.

Meanwhile, time dragged along very irksomely

with Sam Kineo. The fact that he was comparatively safe so long as he stayed in the wigwam, only made abiding there more dismal to him: there was not even the excitement of uncertainty and suspense.

"Tell you what, Madge," he grumbled out one day, as she stood at the door of the wigwam looking down upon him, "I'm going to see Golightley now; get this thing over, one way or 'nother. You tell him I must see him to-night."

"You'd better leave me to manage him; he'll get the better of you, somehow. And I sometimes think, from the way he goes on, that he has done something already to make himself safe."

"I've got something to make him safe!" growled Sam, tapping the breast of his coat.

"If you mean that old bowie-knife of yours——"

"Knife?—it's his handwriting I'm talking about. No, no! no use knifing Golightley yet awhile. I'd like to knife that chap Selwyn."

"He's the only man I ever met that I couldn't make in love with me," remarked Madge thoughtfully. "But that's because he's so infatuated with Elinor Golightley. I can't make out, though, why she doesn't marry him instead of Golightley."

"Oh, no telling 'bout women!" muttered Sam contemptuously. "Most likely she's in love with Garth, and jealous of you."

"In love with Garth!" repeated Madge sharply:

then she smiled incredulously. "Poor Garth! nobody was ever in love with him but I: and he never loved any one but me. I've never had the fun of being jealous."

"You just wait," returned Sam, chuckling maliciously. "Going? Fill my pipe for me first, there's a little dear; and don't forget about Golightley."

On leaving the wigwam and its loutish occupant, Madge descended wearily to the bedroom floor. It was quite dark; from Garth's chamber came sounds of light-hearted talk and laughter. Suddenly the door opened and Elinor came forth, her whole bearing eloquent of alert and cheerful composure. Madge drew noiselessly aside and saw her, herself unseen, pass down the broad staircase. A sphere of purity and wholesomeness seemed to invest her as she moved. Madge gave a short sigh, and passed her hand across her forehead. After a few moments' hesitation she advanced towards the door which Elinor had just closed, and laid her finger on the latch. But her purpose, whatever it may have been, faltered: she drew back, and went wearily on downstairs. In truth it was a long way from the wigwam to Garth's chamber.

CHAPTER LXVI.

A NEW NEPHEW.

AFTER supper that night, the audience being assembled as usual in the convalescent's room, Elinor took up her violin and made ready to play. Whereupon Uncle Golightley, who had been making himself highly entertaining for the past half hour, got up and caressed his cheeks and settled his eyeglasses.

"Now I'm going to be impolite," said he, stepping to Elinor's side and taking her hand lightly in his. "Instead of listening to your music I'm going to retire to my room and see whether I can't get rid of a confounded headache that's been dogging me all day. Bye-bye! pray that I may reappear sound and whole at breakfast." He raised her finger-tips gallantly to his lips, waved his hand with a smile to Garth and Cuthbert, and departed.

Among many odd specifics for the cure of headaches, Golightley's was certainly one of the oddest. Having shut himself into his room, he slipped a pair of india-rubber overshoes over his boots, washed his hands carefully, brushed his hair and beard, and ended by putting on a jaunty travelling-cap and a pair of lemon-coloured kid gloves. After surveying himself in the glass, he took from a corner of the room a handsome gold-headed walking-stick. Pressing a spring in the handle, he drew forth out of its hiding-place a long, blue, needle-pointed stiletto. He examined the blade closely, tried the point upon his thumb, resheathed it slowly, and remained for several moments with the cane balanced across his hand and his eyes fixed doubtfully upon it. At length he seemed to alter his mind as to the expediency of taking the weapon with him, and replacing it in its corner, he stepped out of the room and noiselessly ascended the garret stairs.

The person who admitted him to Nikomis's apartment, closed the door after him and fastened it. The room was lighted only by the small oil lamp which was burning inside the wigwam. Golightley, having removed his eye-glasses, was able to discern a tall athletic figure standing close beside him.

"Mr. Flint, I presume?" said he. "Is your respected female relative present?"

"Just you 'nd me alone together, and the door

locked!" was the somewhat menacing reply. Apparently the host meant to intimidate his visitor before dealing with him.

"I've no doubt you're right in thinking we're alone, Sam," rejoined the latter easily, replacing his eye-glasses. "Still, you know, *humanum est errare.* I'll trouble you to bring that lamp out of the tent, and let me have a look for myself. Elderly men, you know, get fussy about small matters.—The lamp, if you please!" he repeated in a louder, but still affable tone. "Or shall I call down stairs for one?"

"Oh, take a look 'f you like," said Sam, with a sneer. He brought out the lamp, and Golightley, taking it from his hand, stepped back and surveyed him attentively from head to foot, smiling blandly the while.

"The face is the face of Samuel," he remarked at length; "but the toggery is the toggery of—where *did* you find those garments, my young friend? singular eccentricity in a fellow with fifty thousand pounds in his pocket!"

Mr. Flint gave a snarl, and stepped quite close up to his interlocutor, as if to emphasise his own superiority in height and brawn. "I don't want that sort of talk," said he. "My money's gone, 'nd you've got to make it up to me."

"See what comes of wearing shabby clothes! Your pocket, I suppose, had a hole in it?" As

Golightley made this laughing reply, he held the lamp close to Sam's face, which wore at this moment a most unamiable expression. "Take it," he added, "it's soiling my gloves; and I'll excuse you from hunting after eavesdroppers this time. Will you lead the way into your boudoir?" They entered, and the visitor threw himself down on the mattress and looked about him. "Ah! so this is the abode of the noble savage!" said he, as he drew off his gloves. "And—one, two, three, four—by George! do you mean to say the old lady lifted all that hair herself?"

"If 't hadn't been for Nikomis," answered Sam, who had squatted down just inside the wigwam door, "my mother's scalp would ha' been there too."

"Really? And may I ask who your mother was?"

"You know, but I don't mind telling you. She was your father's daughter."

"That's interesting," murmured Golightley, producing a cigarette. "And what may have been my sister's married name?"

"I've got the papers. All safe, 'bout that."

"It's to be hoped they're drawn up in proper form," rejoined the other, as he struck a match. "If it's your ambition to share with Garth the honour of being my nephew, you must be careful not to tell lies, you know. However, taking the papers for granted, what next? Have you any plans?"

"Oh, I know what b'longs to me!" said Sam, nodding his head.

"Eve's legacy, eh? Well now, Samuel, I'll speak to you, for argument's sake, as if you were the nephew you profess to be, as well as the thieving vagabond that you are.—There, there—don't get excited! Try one of my cigarettes. Now keep your eye on me!"

Here the speaker sat erect, and spreading out the long fingers of his left hand, accented his discourse upon them with the forefinger of his right.

"Assuming, then, the lawful heir to have arrived armed with the proper credentials, we have first to consider certain irregularities of his, evidence of which is in the hands of the police, and which constitute him a felon. This fact, we may suppose, would make him feel a certain delicacy about proclaiming himself, as it were, from the house-tops; he would be more likely, perhaps, to hide himself in the top of the house—ha, ha! Well, but let us suppose that this legacy was not his only resource; that he had another, by which he might benefit without being obliged to declare his identity. Let us suppose, in short, that the uncle of this individual possessed a fortune of a good many thousand pounds."

"What's the use of all this pow-wow?" interrupted Sam surlily. "Twenty thousand pounds is my figure, 'nd low enough, too. If you don't pay up, I'll turn States' evidence—that's all about it!"

"The value of States' evidence, my dear Samuel," rejoined Golightley, still unruffled, "depends upon its being obtainable only from one source. Now, in the present case, without questioning your possession of sufficient evidence to convict me, I must inform you that if you decide upon giving that evidence, it will be at once forestalled, and thus rendered valueless. In other words, rather than put you to the pain of swearing your uncle into jail, I would swear myself in! See the point?"

Golightley was evidently enjoying his command of the situation, and the humorous sententiousness of his statement of it; while Sam could not but feel that he had been to some extent outwitted. He reflected, however, that although Golightley might, by surrendering his booty, and giving himself up to justice, nullify Sam's own attack, he must still be willing to pay liberally for the assurance of Sam's silence. What other propositions he might have in reserve, the half-breed could not divine; so he waited sullenly for developments; and his patience was rewarded.

"It amounts to about this," said the elder man. "You have, or are supposed to have, two things which I am willing to buy of you. The first thing is the bundle of my letters and memoranda relating to our little transaction abroad. The second thing is the certificate of your mother's marriage, and your own birth. I'm disposed to be generous. How much?"

Sam was neither a saint nor a person ordinarily sensitive about his honour; yet the idea of selling his birthright struck him unpleasantly. He had, all his life, had occasion to lament the disadvantages of obscure birth; and having only within the last few weeks come to a knowledge of his true parentage, he was not disposed lightly to surrender the proofs of it. True, he could make no practical use of it at present; but every human being has something which, to him, is above being bartered for on any terms; and in Sam's case this priceless treasure turned out (somewhat to his own surprise and annoyance, perhaps) to be his birthright. He was perplexed, and a little ashamed, but he could not help it.

"I don't want to be hard on an old pal," he said, in his rapid undertoned way. "Give me a cheque for ten thousand pounds, 'nd you may have your letters."

"Ten thousand for the letters?—modest, upon my word! But I suppose you throw the certificates in?"

"Not a bit of it! I mean to keep those."

"Keep them! You're crazy, what can you do with them?"

"Well, I'll just keep 'em."

"Now, Samuel, no one knows your merits better than I do; but I've only a moderate capacity, and I can't swallow more than one nephew. Those certi-

ficates can never be worth a penny to you, and yet I'll pay you well for them. It's a feeling I have—you, very naturally, can't understand it—that the line must be drawn somewhere; and I draw it at your nephewship. Come, what will you take?"

"You're my uncle," said the half-breed sullenly, "and you've got to say so. I'd go to the gallows sooner than give it up. You'll not get those certificates, Uncle Golightley."

Luckily for Sam, his unwilling relative did not know that not he but Nikomis was the actual possessor of the certificates in question. As it was, the position of the men towards each other was changed, and now the nephew had the best of it.

"I'll take the cheque for your letters," observed the latter, as Golightley smoked his cigarette in silence. Golightley looked up, and the eyes of the men met. They were at bay; but the elder had the most to lose; and after a moment he spoke with the manner of a man who accepts the inevitable with the best grace possible.

"Well, since you insist upon being one of us, you ought to look at things from a family point of view. I'm to marry the woman to whom this money belongs; not only that, but I should never have laid a finger on the money if I hadn't had that marriage in view. It wasn't a robbery in the ordinary sense of the term—only a sort of family arrangement."

"You're as much a thief as I am," was Sam's gracious interruption; "and I'm as much of a gentleman as you are."

"It would be spoiling two good things for you to insist too much upon the gentleman. However, my point is this: In paying you hush-money, I rob her—my future wife—and defeat the object for which I engaged in the transaction at first. You've had more than a fair share already. Will you take five thousand? I appeal to you as a thief and a man of honour."

Sam perceived Golightley's irony, though he could not perceive his object in being ironical just at that time. He answered doggedly:

"Ten thousand is what I'll have, Uncle Golightley, 'nd more afterwards if I need it. Whichever of us has it, it'll be in the family all the same, you know! And if I go to the devil, the rest of you shall go along with me."

"You drive a hard bargain, Samuel," remarked Golightley, looking at the half-breed with a curious expression of amusement. "Recollect how the last straw broke the camel's back, and be careful to stop at the last but one. Well, I'll write you the cheque. You know our bankers, and how to manage the affair with safety to yourself. How long do you propose to remain in your present quarters?"

"That's my own lookout; just you write out the cheque."

"Perhaps you'd like a little ready money to start on? If you travel in that costume, with a cheque for ten thousand pounds in your pocket, it might prove awkward for you, and so for me." He took out his pocket-book. "I've a thousand dollars in gold and bank-notes here; you'd better take them and get yourself an outfit."

Sam took the money and examined it closely, being naturally suspicious of such kindly thoughtfulness on the part of his new-found uncle. But both notes and coin were genuine, and the half-breed pocketed them with the self-satisfied grimace of a scamp who has got the better of his fellow.

Golightley now arose and stepped forth from the wigwam, and began putting on his gloves again. "I shall see you once more, then," said he, turning upon his host, who stood like a black pillar against the smoky light that glowed within the wigwam. "Perhaps, by that time, you'll have thought better about those certificates. I shan't mind writing that cheque double, if you do."

"Good-night, uncle!" was all Sam's reply.

"Au revoir! you're a sharp fellow," returned the other, and went out. On the landing below he heard the sound of Elinor's singing. Moving softly to the door, he leaned against the jamb, and listened there until the song ceased. Then he stole back to his chamber, and was seen no more that night.

CHAPTER LXVII.

CRAFT.

EVER since his quarrel with Madge Danver in the pantry, Jack Selwyn had been asking himself whether or not her information regarding the robbery was extensive and particular enough to be of value: and Madge, on the other hand, had amused herself with mystifying him to the utmost of her power. He had pretty well made up his mind that the accomplice of whom he was in search was named Sam Kineo; but, assuming such to be the fact, he was at a loss to imagine why Madge should hesitate to expose him. He knew that the two had been acquainted in childhood; but even supposing an attachment to have existed between them at that time, it was not credible that it should survive a separation of ten years or more. Neither could he believe that her reticence was merely whimsical, for

he had offered her substantial inducements to break it. And finally, if she really knew nothing, how was she able to appear so knowing?

One evening, when she was preparing to return from Urmhurst to her own home, Jack offered to accompany her, and his escort was accepted. It was a cold bright night, and as the two young people paced arm in arm together beneath the leafless trees, they might have been taken for a pair of lovers. Indeed Madge, glancing at Selwyn's manly face out of the corner of her long dark eye, may have sighed to think what a charming wooer he would make; and Jack, as he felt the light pressure of her shoulder and caught the outline of her glowing cheek, might have mused how sweet would be the wooing of her. But it did not happen to be their destiny to love each other. The conversation proceeded in an unromantic and even uninteresting strain, until Madge exclaimed, slipping her hand from his arm and stepping aside:

"Do be more agreeable, or witty, or something! Why did you come with me? I can find my own way home perfectly well."

"I've been wondering, then, how you got hold of my letter to Garth, and what use you made of it?"

"That is neither witty nor agreeable, nor even polite. If you have reason to suspect me of knowing anything about it, you should know how I came

to know; and if you suspect me without reason, you are insulting!"

"If it would be politer to believe you a witch—that's my only alternative."

"That is to say, a woman with brains must be either dishonest or a witch. Perhaps there are other ways of finding out things than through your letters, Mr. Selwyn. If you were not so busy with your suspicions, maybe you'd see more. Tell me now—of what do you suspect me?" She bent forward and looked smiling in his face.

"Of not seeing your own best interests."

"Yes; women must always be thinking of their best interests—that's men's idea! and the lower the interest, of course the more they think of it."

"No, Miss Madge. Some women are disinterested——"

"Elinor Golightley, for instance—because you are in love with her. But if she should happen to marry the gentleman to whom she's engaged, maybe you wouldn't except even her. What right have you to treat me as if I were not a lady?" she went on angrily. "You know nothing against me. What are you? Do gentlemen try to get on the right side of women when they want to steal something from them, and are not clever enough to get what they are after fairly?"

"All right, Miss Madge; I'll be plain with you, if you wish it. It's true that I undertook this job

chiefly for Elinor Golightley's sake; but that is nothing to the present purpose. But it's true, too, that I do suspect you—of intending to play false with Garth, and turn all this trouble to your own advantage."

"But how I'm going to make it turn to my own advantage is more than you can imagine—eh, Mr. Selwyn?" she interposed banteringly. "I can guess your thoughts. You believe that Mr. Golightley Urmson has done something very wrong, and that I, somehow or other, have found it out; and that I meant either to marry poor Golightley or to blackmail him, and then run away to Europe and be happy. And yet you were puzzled at my being such a goose as to receive stolen goods, knowing them to be such; and you wondered why—if money was what I wanted—I didn't take your reward and tell all I knew. Am I correct so far, Mr. Selwyn?"

"At all events you guess well," said Jack, with a smile.

"Well, perhaps you'll tell me the rest of your suspicions yourself."

"I'm sure you can do it better than I could."

"You promised to be straightforward, and instead of that you are sarcastic. Well, I'll play my own part and yours too. Did you never hear of Sam Kineo?"

"I've heard of a Mr. Flint——"

"Oh, yes and Mr. Flint is Mr. Kineo—that's easy

enough. Well, he and I used to be great friends. He was in love with me, and . . . a great many things might have happened, only that I became engaged to Garth, and thought it to my interest (as you would say) not to break with him. Of course I wasn't true to Garth because I loved him, you know; I shouldn't think of trying to make a clever man of the world like Mr. Jack Selwyn believe such an absurd thing as that!"

"What do you want me to believe?"

"Only what you can't help believing; but please don't be so cross! Well, Sam Kineo has written to me several times since he was abroad; and several months ago he wrote me that he had made a great deal of money, and wanted—me!—to help him spend it. But my best interests, as usual, prevented me from accepting his offer. Then, only a little while ago—since you came here, in fact—he wrote me that he was poor again and——"

"He wrote you since I have been here?"

"Don't get excited, Mr. Selwyn, please," said Madge, quietly resuming his arm.

"Where was his letter dated from?"

"Oh! I'm not sure that I remember that!"

"I have reason to think that Sam Kineo is concealed somewhere in this neighbourhood. Perhaps you'll let me see his letter?"

"It wouldn't be right, I'm afraid, without his permission. Besides, if he's in this neighbourhood,

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the letter must be a forgery, so it would be of no use to you."

"Look here!" exclaimed Jack impatiently, "damn this hide-and-seek game! I'll admit I'm not your equal at it. If you've anything to tell, out with it, in your own way! You know whether or not it will be worth your while. But if you only want to amuse yourself—be amused, in the devil's name!"

"I am amused, thank you," said she, with a low laugh. "But I have something to tell you too. This Mr. Flint, as you call him, had a plan which he wanted me to help him in. The police, it seems, after trying to catch him for a long time, and failing, at last gave him to understand that if he would come forward of his own accord and give evidence against a certain person who was implicated with him, he should receive a free pardon for himself."

"He was right, so far," remarked Selwyn.

"But you see, one reason of his receiving such a kind offer was, that he had lost all his money, so that nothing except his evidence could be got out of him. Well, he thought the offer over, and by-and-by it seemed to him that he could do better."

"He thought so, did he?"

"Yes, and I think he was right. This—certain person, you know, could be convicted only on Mr. Flint's evidence—there would be no use in arresting him without that; so it was probable that he would be willing to pay Mr. Flint a good deal—several

thousand pounds, perhaps—to destroy all evidence against him. And this letter that I received asks me to find out how much money this certain person will give for the evidence papers; and if the bargain is made, I am to hand over the papers to the certain person, and carry the money to Mr. Flint. Isn't that a good plan? and don't you think it would be to my best interest to help in it?"

"I don't know what to think."

"Oh, then it's no matter; especially as I have given him my answer."

"Given him your answer?"

"I wrote him to send me the papers, and I would get the money for them."

"Gracious God!" muttered Jack, and plunged into a silent tumult of thought. Could it be that this girl, so far from scheming dishonestly for her own advantage, had actually contrived to bring both thieves to justice by her unaided ingenuity? If so, what a long and painful apology Jack owed her! But it was his instinct to distrust her, and even yet his faith was weak. "Have you got the papers?" he asked.

"I shouldn't give them to you, Mr. Jack Selwyn, if I did have them."

"What the mischief are you going to do, then?"

"Well, you see," replied Madge, folding her hands demurely in her muff and looking up at him, "it wouldn't be nice to have people we know arrested

and sent to prison, no matter what they had done. I'm sure Mr. Cuthbert Urmson wouldn't like that, nor Miss Elinor Golightley either. So I thought I would tell the certain person that I had the evidence against him, but that if he would give back the money to the person from whom it was stolen, I would destroy the evidence; and nothing more should be said or done about it."

Jack mused for a while, twisting his moustache and rubbing his chin. "It's true enough," said he, "that the recovery of the money is the main thing, and that arrests may be very disagreeable to all concerned; but for all that, we have no right to compound a felony. Why should you shield these two scamps? You don't really care for them?"

"I care for the honour of the family," replied Madge after a pause.

"The honour of the family has suffered all it can already; punishing those who've dishonoured it won't make matters any worse. Put us on the track of this fellow Flint, or Kineo, and let justice take its course."

"Are you quite sure, Mr. Selwyn, that you'd be so anxious justice should take its course, if its doing so would not clear a rival out of your way?"

"The thief would be known to those most concerned, whether he were publicly convicted or not: it would be the same to me in either case."

"If I loved a man," exclaimed Madge quickly,

"I'd stick to him all the closer if he did wrong and got into trouble!"

"I dare say you would. But since you don't love such a man, let's understand each other. Your plan is to destroy the evidence papers, after having used them to compel the restoration of the stolen money to its owner. But have the papers actually been handed over to you?"

She appeared to hesitate, and finally shook her head.

"I thought not: and it isn't likely that Kineo would be such a fool as to let you have them until he got his fingers on the money. But look here. If we know where he is, you can safely pay him the money, and we'll come down on him after he's received it, and bag money, papers and all. That's the only sure way."

"If Sam Kineo would trust me with knowing where he was, he would trust me with his papers. I can deceive him about the money, for that belongs to some one else; but his liberty belongs to him; it wouldn't be fair to help you take that away from him."

"Oh, for mercy's sake, my good young friend, don't let yourself become sentimental about such a blackguard! If he trusts you, depend upon it he trusts you to be a fool: he would take your scalp any moment if he thought he could get five dollars for it!"

"Do you really think so?" murmured Madge gazing guilelessly up in her companion's eyes. "Is he such a villain as that?"

"I'm afraid he is, Miss Madge," replied Jack, shaking his head.

She appeared to hesitate awhile, but finally said: "Don't you think, after getting the papers from him, you might make that certain person give up the money without sending him to prison, or having any more trouble?"

"It isn't for me to decide. But if you think it would make you feel better, I'll do what I can to bring it about."

"Well, then—but maybe you won't believe I'm telling you the truth?"

"Good Lord! Nobody lies without an object," cried Jack, who was quite at the end of his patience.

"And since you see no object in my telling lies, you are willing to believe me? You are always so polite!"

"If you care for my apologies, Miss Danver, you shall have as many as you want, with all my heart. But you yourself helped me to misjudge you."

She put her hand reluctantly in her pocket. "Do you know Sam Kineo's handwriting?—Very well, then, this letter will tell you all I know. I don't believe you'll catch him, mind! The address is not very precise."

Jack took the letter, and holding it in the moonlight, glanced hastily through it. "The deuce!" muttered he; "in Canada?" Madge watched him with a peculiar sparkle in her eyes, but said nothing. "I shall leave here to-morrow," continued Selwyn, after another examination of the letter. "If we succeed it will be owing to you. Of course, you won't speak of this to any one. A careless word, you know, might do as much harm as you have done good."

"I shall be very prudent, Mr. Selwyn," returned Madge demurely. "You needn't come any farther with me—there is my house. Good-night."

"I managed that well," said Jack self-approvingly to himself, as he slammed the door of his bedchamber half an hour later, and set about packing his valise. "But I'll be hanged if I can quite see through that girl, yet!"

Sam Kineo, awakened from his doze in the garret by the noise of the door, muttered a curse on the world in general, and rolled up his head in the blanket.

BOOK IX.

FERMENTATION.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

LADY ELEANOR.

ONE afternoon Elinor took it into her head to have a look at the studio. No one had entered this room since the occasion of the little party's assembling there in the autumn, to see the unfinished picture. After standing a moment or two on the threshold, she went in.

A grey film of dust had gathered over everything, deepening the feeling of solitude and desolation which the studio inspired. The intruder stepped lightly, as one who fears to awaken a sleeper. Each object that met her eyes seemed entranced—awaiting the moment when a spell should be broken, and the frozen stillness change to genial life. It was a bitterly cold day, and the skylight was arabesqued

with frost. Glancing towards the fireplace, Elinor saw a small pile of wood, the remains of last year's fuel, standing behind the stove. She kindled a fire; and soon the frost on the skylight began to liquefy, the air to smell faintly of heated iron, and the dreary influence which heretofore had brooded over the room to yield to the benign influence of flame.

An old duster of peacock feathers was hanging from a peg beside the fireplace. She disengaged it, and was about to whisk it across the surface of the dust-veiled picture on the easel. On second thoughts, however, she left this untouched, and contented herself with dusting the other objects in the studio. As she did so, the recollection of that October afternoon returned upon her with circumstantial distinctness. There was the very sketch upon the wall which Mr. Urmson had pointed out to her, and commented upon so humorously. Yonder, in front of the easel, had stood Golightley, his hand upon Garth's shoulder, and speaking to him in an undertone, while the artist leaned against the back of the chair, with lowering brows, biting his lip. On the sofa, Madge and Mrs. Tenterden laughed and chatted together. Later, when the rest had gone, Elinor sat on the same sofa, the portfolio lying open between her and Garth, who was so preoccupied that only her involuntary outburst of laughter had aroused him. She smiled again at that recollection. And here was the same sofa, and the portfolio just

as they had left it so many weeks ago. She sat down in the old place, and thought over all that they had spoken together, until she could almost believe that he was once more beside her. . . . No! she was alone.

Having furbished up the neglected studio, Elinor, after the wont of benefactors, conceived a kindness for it, and thenceforward used it as her boudoir. She had not much leisure; for though Garth was now quite convalescent, his father seemed to be failing rapidly, and it was Elinor's sad pleasure to be his nurse. When occasion served, however, she would quietly mount the garret stairs, and having made her fire in the little stove, sit down to read or ponder over the portfolio, or play upon her violin. No one ever disturbed her here, or even seemed aware of her retreat. Even Golightley never sought her out; but his manner towards her had, during the last few weeks, undergone a welcome change from flippant gallantry to unobtrusive observance. As for Jack Selwyn, he had some time since departed on a journey—whither or with what purpose was not declared.

As she was reclining one day on the sofa, shaping out dreamy forms of melody on her violin, the door opened, and Garth came in.

"So this is where you go?" said he. "I've heard mysterious music for the last week or two. The old studio looks comfortable."

"You shouldn't have come up," exclaimed Elinor, blushing a little. "What if you were to have a relapse! You must lie down on this sofa."

"No relapses or sofas for me! I'm going to get to work again at my old picture. Go on with your playing."

"I was going down in a few minutes."

"Don't—I shall work better to music. Stay a little while."

He sat down in front of the easel. He was far from robust-looking; but the fever seemed to have filed away an encrustation over the true man, leaving the spirit in him more free and powerful. His expression had lost its former sullenness, and there was something really beautiful in his smile."

"You didn't touch this," he remarked, nodding towards the picture. "I'm glad you didn't—no one but I can make it clean!" He seized the pallet-cloth as he spoke, and rubbed it over the canvas, which glowed forth once more in the sombre brilliance of its colouring. Then leaning back in his chair, he gazed at it long and steadfastly, as he might have gazed at an enemy who had fought him to the death. At length he took up his palette and brushes, and began mixing some fresh tints.

"It was here we had our first talk—do you remember it? The first, and the last, but one! The other was at the picnic: and now here we are again. After all, it's less than a dozen weeks,

altogether. But we must forget each other now, and set to work. You play me something, and I'll paint it."

After some little wandering prelude, Elinor rose by degrees to the full height of musical possession, and played as she had never played to any one but Garth. Like all profound musicians, she penetrated to the soul of facts and incidents; she saw the story of her life translated into large meanings, and with subtle bow and faultless fingers she gave the vision utterance. Art is the duct through which divinity reaches man, and there are moments when the duct becomes a river, and the artist prophesies with a voice greater than his own—the creative voice that harmonises all things. But insomuch as every interpretation smacks of the interpreter there was so much of Elinor's personality in her music that Garth, inspired with it, was in truth inspired with her. He painted rapidly and vehemently, and yet in a kind of trance. It was the emotional side of the man that was at work; his intellectual and material parts acted merely as instruments.

At length Elinor lowered her bow, and Garth his brush, both with a sense of exhaustion, as after intense albeit unheeded exercise. Drops of sweat stood on Garth's forehead, and his hands trembled. After a few moments he got up, and walking with a heavy step to the sofa, sat down there wearily.

"You see, you were not strong enough," Elinor said, with an upbraiding smile.

"Yes, I was: for it's done."

"I'm very glad," said she, with a long breath.

"So am I!" rejoined he; and there was a happy look in his deepset eyes.

"May I see it?"

"Yes—in a few minutes. I don't know myself what I've painted yet. The music did more of it than I."

After a pause he continued, "In fact, it's been your doing from the beginning. You first set me fermenting that day up here; then you shamed the devil out of me at the picnic; and you saved my life in the fever."

"I should like to think I had helped you. I was useless before I met you."

"You sha'n't find it useless to have helped me."

They had fallen unawares upon a region of emotion which was perilous, yet hard to escape from. There was much that they might say to each other.

"A man can only begin to be happy when he sees that happiness is not good for him. It is hard to take things to heart and yet keep tender-hearted —isn't it?"

"I suppose we live here so as to become strong enough for heaven. It takes strength to bear worldly happiness: and eternal happiness . . ."

"If I become strong enough to be your friend, I shall be satisfied."

"Then be satisfied!" said Elinor, smiling, but with tears. Garth took her extended hand, and held it for a breath or two, meeting her eyes the while. The world seemed far off, but whether joy or pain were mightiest in their hearts, they knew not. But they knew that in the last few minutes, they had lived.

It is the profoundest emotion that soonest veils itself. Garth presently stretched up his arms, clasped his hands behind his head, and said with a smile:

"I shall be a great artist after all—an old master! I feel immense confidence in myself! Other artists have not had my inspiration. The world ought to know that my best pictures were painted with a violin."

"I like better that the violin should be hidden in the pictures," said she tremulously.

"Well—as the soul is hidden in the body. But the soul outlasts the body; so you will get your deserts at last."

"Oh, I have them now!"

"Let us see what I have been doing here," exclaimed Garth abruptly, rising from the sofa. "The light will be gone in half an hour more."

At this juncture, however, Madge and Golightley climbed the garret stairs, knocked, and entered.

"Didn't I tell you so!" laughed the former,

glancing at her companion. "Dear me, how cozy everything looks. It was so kind of you, dear Elinor, to think of bringing that poor black and white creature up here, for a change!"

Golightley stood by in silence; his usual volubility and self-importance seemed to have deserted him of late. Garth explained laconically that he was an intruder in the studio, not a guest.

"But music and painting belong together, as we all know," returned Madge lightly. "I suppose you inspire one another."

"I've kept you waiting a long time for your picture," remarked Garth, turning to his uncle, "and now I have no picture for you. Come and see."

They all moved in front of the canvas. Garth was himself the first to break the momentary silence that ensued. He glanced at Elinor and murmured:

"It was a real inspiration!"

"What?" demanded Madge sharply, setting her small white teeth against her under lip.

"H'm—yes—I see!" muttered Golightley, adjusting his eye-glasses, and bending forward. "You've painted Margaret out, and Elinor in. An inspiration, sure enough!"

"Of course, the alteration puts an end to our bargain. I preferred to follow my own judgment. But I'd no idea I was painting you, Elinor; it's strange!"

"I don't think it looks much like me," Elinor said.

"Not pretty enough, of course," began Madge.

"I mean, it's idealised too much to be called a likeness," interrupted the other, with one of her point-blank looks.

"But at least you think it better than mine?" Madge continued, the blood rushing into her cheeks.

Elinor turned upon her again and said coldly:

"It is better than yours, for the picture."

"Garth, you said just now that our bargain was off," observed Golightley, laying his hand on the artist's shoulder. "By George! so say I too. The picture, as it was yesterday, was a fine picture—worth a thousand pounds to me, and more to a richer man. But as it stands there at this moment, Garth Urmson, it's worth ten times that—a hundred times that! With those few rapid touches, you have wrought a miracle; and I believe, from my soul, that you have painted the greatest picture of its kind that there is in the world! By George, Garth, I mean what I say!"

Indeed, it was very evident, both from the tone of Uncle Golightley's voice and the workings of his countenance, that he was unusually moved. Everybody was surprised, not only at his emotion, but at his words. The greatest picture of its kind in the world! They all looked again at the canvas. The light was already fading, but the face of the new

Lady Eleanor gleamed forth with marvellous power. The greatest in the world! Was it not so, indeed?

"I'm afraid Uncle Golightley won't have money enough to pay for it," remarked Madge dryly. The light had faded quite out; the spell was broken. The picture had lived its moment. But if it had touched the top of art, and found appreciation, a moment was long enough.

"By-the-bye, my dear Elinor," said Golightley, as they turned away from the easel, "Mildred sent me up here to find you. She wants to ask you something about Cuthbert's medicine. Shall we go down?"

CHAPTER LXIX.

BETWEEN DARKNESS AND LIGHT.

WHEN the two had taken their departure, Madge threw herself down on the sofa and burst out laughing, holding her handkerchief before her mouth and biting it with her teeth. Meanwhile she watched Garth with an angry sparkle in her eyes. She looked as dangerous as she was beautiful. Garth had remained in front of the picture, but his face was turned towards her. Suddenly she stopped laughing and exclaimed:

"Do pray look somewhere else. Isn't the greatest picture in the world better worth studying than I am?"

"I wasn't looking at you as an artist."

"Oh no, I suppose not. I'm not good enough for pictures. You were only looking at me as a lover—a true, devoted, passionate lover—ha, ha, ha!"

"I expected you to be angry."

"What! angry because I caught you flirting with Elinor Golightley? My own sweet Garth, you were never more mistaken! Did you imagine I haven't seen what's been going on between you two from the first? I understand it—it's an artistic affinity, that's all!"

A flash of resentment crossed Garth's face, and he turned away.

"I want you to listen to me," said Madge, in a low, smooth voice, leaning forwards toward him with an undulation of the neck and shoulders, as of a tiger creeping to ambush. "Come and sit by me, please."

He drew up a chair and sat down before her. "Try not to say what is disgraceful, Madge—for your own sake."

"Or for Elinor's sake—which? You are an impostor, Garth Urmson! I don't care how wicked a man is, if only he lets it be known, and isn't afraid. If you had said, long ago, 'I'm tired of you—I'm going off with another woman!' . . . . If you'd strike me, now, for saying what I'm saying, instead of sitting there with your hands in your pockets, pretending you're shocked and grieved—ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Garth lowered his eyes; he made no reply. Madge was drawn up on the sofa, resting her cheek on her clenched white hand; she kept one position,

yet a subtle, continuous motion vibrated through her body and limbs. There was a look in her eyes which Garth did not choose to meet. Such looks are harder to forget than the most poisonous words.

"You may find that you'd better have sold your picture as it was, instead of taking all that trouble to insult me. Golightley won't buy it now, for all his talk; and I'd have let you go and welcome without your throwing away a thousand pounds. You think Elinor can make it up to you; but what if she didn't get back her fortune after all? Do you suppose she could make you as rich as I could have done? I wish you were worth being jealous of—but I can live as I like in spite of you! What do you know of how a woman may love a man? I wish I did love you—for an hour—so that I might show you what love is, and then leave you to want me for ever! I wonder that there's a single good woman in the world! I don't believe there is, unless she's a fool!"

These wild sentences followed each other rapidly, with low-toned, malignant emphasis. Still looking down, Garth said huskily,

"How came such thoughts into your mind?"

"They are the truth."

"They are false!" said he, in a voice that made her shrink. He raised his eyes, and such was the light of indignation in them, that the expression

of the woman's face was quenched. Though she knew that Garth would never harm a hair of her head, she felt the thrill of absolute fear. Something he would do!

"What makes you beautiful?" he asked sternly and sadly. Other words seemed about to follow, but he held them back. That one question was pregnant enough. It entered into Madge's soul, and made her know that all power of her physical fascination was thenceforth at an end with him. If she would regain him now, it must be by other means. But what other means had she? She had worshipped her beauty, conquered by it, risked her future upon it. If it were despised, what was left her?

"Make me ugly, then!" she whispered, setting her teeth: "strike my face! crush me!" She was half beside herself.

"I could give you no other beauty instead of that."

She caught a tone of compassion in his voice, and the idea that he pitied her, drove her mad. She sprang up with a wild look, and the thought, "I will kill myself!"

Glancing about, her eyes lighted on the rusty cutlass that hung above the fireplace. She glided round Garth, leaped up with a sharp cry, and caught it down. Awkwardly, but with good-will enough, she aimed a sort of thrust at herself. Garth was in

time to turn the blow aside; then he struck the weapon from her grasp. She screamed with rage, and sprang for it again. It had fallen at the foot of the easel; as she rose with it in her hand, the picture confronted her. Instantly she plunged the blade through the canvas, cutting and stabbing until every vestige of the new Lady Eleanor was destroyed, and the entire painting was a mass of tatters. This done, she looked round for Garth.

The excitement of the afternoon, culminating in Madge's desperate attempt against herself, had been too much for the convalescent, and the moment after disarming her, he had fainted away. Madge saw him lying face downwards on the floor, and felt her blood thicken with horror; for her first idea was that he had been wounded by the cutlass in the struggle, and was dead. She got on her knees beside him, took him in her arms, and with the unconscious strength of excitement, rose and fairly carried him to the sofa. Then she searched for a wound or a bloodstain; but there was none to be found. It was only a fainting fit—with a sob of relief in her throat that assurance came to her at last. She herself was worse used than he. Her dark hair hung loose upon her shoulders, the bosom of her dress was torn open, the wrist which he had struck was bruised, and there was a thin cut across her left palm.

She lifted his powerless hand to her lips and

kissed it; then put it in her bare bosom and let her heart beat against it. "Do I not love him?" she asked herself. "I would die for him. But I can't get up to him; and now he doesn't care that I am beautiful."

The fainting man gave a sigh; she took his hand from her bosom and stood up. "If I only had some cordial!" she thought; and in a moment an idea struck her, and she swiftly left the room.

Sam Kineo, moodily smoking on his pile of blankets, was startled by her sudden entrance and sprang to his feet. "What's the matter now?" he whispered; "Police?"

"Give me your brandy—quick! Garth has fainted."

"Garth? bah!—let him faint."

"Sam Kineo, you must give it me."

"Must, eh? I see, you're making love to him again! Now, don't get excited, my little dear; the brandy's safe in my coat-pocket. But before you get it, you'll have to give me a kiss. Come now!"

"I will never——"

"Then you don't get the brandy."

"Oh, Sam, don't ask me now—only not this time! I'll come back afterwards— Oh, any time but now!"

"Any time won't do. Tell you what, my little beauty, I won't stand this dodging about—pleasant 's piecrust in the morning, 'nd flustering up in the

evening! You'll just give me a nice affectionate kiss, and then you may go to dear Garth with the brandy."

Madge felt that she must submit. She had put herself in the way of evil with her eyes open, and had ere now discovered that it is not so easy to play fast and loose with evil as with good. The spirit of darkness stretched out its arms, as Sam did now, and forced her to yield him tribute.

"Very well; do as you like," said she in a hard, hopeless tone. Sam chuckled, and having exacted full payment for his brandy, suffered her to take it. At the door she turned and said, "You will be sorry for this all your life." The half-breed only laughed his noiseless laugh, and she came out. But her returning step had lost all spring and lightness, and on the threshold of the studio she faltered, shamed and wretched, and half-minded to steal away again. Nevertheless she entered, and found Garth already in part recovered. The brandy was not needed, after all. "I wonder if he'd thank me," thought the girl, "if he knew what I paid for it!"

"I've not done much good to-day!" was Garth's first observation.

"That's a thing one soon gets used to," she rejoined with bitter lightsomeness.

"Madge—with all my heart I want to be good to you," said he gently. "I'm partly answerable for what you said and did to-day."

"No, no, no! It would make no difference to me to be answerable for much worse things."

"That alteration in the picture was not the insult to you that it seemed to be. It's the first thing I have done to make me worth an honest woman's marrying."

At the mention of the picture, it occurred to Madge that probably Garth had not seen her act of vandalism. She stepped to the easel and moved it so that he could behold the tattered canvas. He gazed straight at it for an appreciable time, and asked—

"Did you do that?"

She nodded.

He clutched his hair and laughed so pleasantly and unexpectedly, that Madge brightened up for a moment as if sunshine had fallen on her.

"Well, I'm glad it's done," said he. "The old picture has served its purpose, and was destroyed at the most fitting moment. My girl, let us annihilate our past in the same way—the bad and foolish part of it, I mean. This shall be our last quarrel."

He tried to take her hand, but she drew it away. "Don't think I'm angry—— or think what you please! There's blood on my hand—it's a bad omen. I've been naughty; I'm not good enough yet. Perhaps—to-morrow!"

"Did you cut yourself?"

"Only a little scratch: I'm sure it might have

been much worse—or better! Yes, why did you interfere? You'd have had your picture safe and me out of the way by now."

"Nothing would be safe for me without you, Madge."

"Don't speak so! If I don't laugh, I shall cry—or go mad again! Don't touch me. I tell you I'm not ready."

"Only say we shall be married soon."

"So that you can say, 'I kept my promise to her!' You don't love me. Why don't you tell me the truth about Elinor Golightley?"

"There are some things a man had better not put too plainly even to himself. At least, Madge, I have never thought of marrying any one but you. My fever has given me time to think, and I believe that if I ever wanted—something, it was because I knew I could never have it—not because it was the thing for me to have."

After a long pause, Madge said, "I didn't hate the picture for being altered. But why did you put her in my place?"

"I did it unconsciously."

Madge sat a few moments as if preoccupied then rose with a tired look. "Thank you for telling me all this," said she. "Of course, I don't understand much of it— You can't expect me to understand things by sympathy, as some people do. But you are very kind to tell me."

"You'll understand when we're married."

"Perhaps I'd better not understand. But we'll talk about being married some other time, when you are stronger, and I'm in a better humour. The fire has gone out, too, and Elinor would scold me if I kept you here in the cold."

CHAPTER LXX.

DATES AND INITIALS.

AFTER Garth and Madge had left the studio that evening, and Madge had gone home, he remembered that he had left the door unlocked; and since it seemed inadvisable that the summary fate of the picture should become known just then, he mounted the garret stairs again, shortly before going to bed, in order to make all safe.

At the head of the stairs a gust of air blew out his lamp. He groped his way towards the studio, found the door, and entered. It was dark, save for a slight glow of red through the draft-holes of the little stove. It seemed to Garth, however, that he was not alone in the room. He stood quite still and listened intently, but there was no sound. He moved towards the stove to get a match from the box on the wall beside it: his leg struck the chair,

and it fell over with some racket. A moment afterwards he fancied he heard a step, light and stealthy, in the passage outside the room; and then —unless his ears deceived him—a door closed softly —the door of Nikomis's apartment. Had she been in here before he came? If so, for what purpose? and why had she stolen away so stealthily?

He now struck a match, lit his lamp, and looked about him. Everything appeared much in the same condition as he had left it a few hours before. There stood the tattered canvas on the easel; on the floor lay the cutlass; and the other evidences of Madge's outbreak and his struggle with her were present. There were no signs of any foreign disturbance. Possibly his senses had deceived him; at all events, Nikomis was welcome to enter his studio if she wanted to; only, why should she have been at such pains to get away undiscovered? After some reflection, Garth dismissed the subject from his mind, as of no possible importance; and having locked the door, and put the key in his pocket, he returned downstairs.

During the next ten days, the artist was content to lay his art aside, and to devote himself exclusively to the business of regaining health and strength; and they returned to him with extraordinary rapidity. It seemed as if the false Lady Eleanor had been the bar to his recovery, if not the cause itself of his illness; and now that she was annihi-

lated, the sick man might arise. Garth was light-hearted, energetic, and serene. He walked, sleighed or skated day after day, breathed deep of the clear cold air, and ate enormously. He was even sociable, was seen often in the village, and became known and liked there as he had never been before. Everybody remarked the change in him for the better, and congratulated him upon it. Mrs. Tenterden merrily supposed that it must be the prospect of being so soon married that was bringing him round; and Garth did not deny it. In fact, it was his determination to be married in the ensuing spring, and he spoke much with Madge about their future, and urged her to use all due despatch with her preparations. And Madge seemed to be more than usually active with her needle, though she could hardly have expected to manufacture an entire trousseau herself. She was not so full of bright talk as usual, but often fell into long silences; and when, occasionally, she allowed herself an outburst of vivacity, a certain hardness was apparent in her voice and manner, seeming to indicate an absence of genuine feeling, and suggesting a latent bitterness. In her ordinary conversation, she betrayed a curious and almost morbid interest in her own condition and prospects. She put hypothetical cases and worked out imaginary situations for herself. But such eccentricities are not uncommon with young women for whom a great

change in life is imminent; and Madge's odd behaviour gave anxiety to no one.

Garth made himself especially agreeable to poor Mrs. Danver, who had been seriously ill of late, and did not seem likely to survive very much longer. He visited her every day, and she became deeply and favourably impressed with him: insomuch that so far from carping at him, as had heretofore been her custom, she now took to extolling him in and out of season. She declared—what, indeed, was the truth — that she'd never had the chance to know him for what he was before; and glad she was, and didn't care who knew it, that Madge was to have a husband who was a gentleman, and a clever, sober, kind-hearted man, what was more; for she would like to know how many there were like him that would come and sit an hour or two every day beside a poor sick complaining woman, who'd never had much sympathy nor consideration that ever she could remember; which it wouldn't have been her fate to say, as say it she must, if there'd been more people, young or old, like Mr. Garth Urmson. And all that troubled her now was, that that strange child Maggie didn't, at times, more than half seem to appreciate her good fortune; not that she supposed there would be much fortune, leastways at first, in the worldly point of view: though there was the Eve legacy would likely be coming round to those the Lord properly intended

it for one of these days: but money was not everything, though times there were she almost feared her Maggie took that view; and if she did, all Mrs. Danver could say was, it wasn't from her mother that the girl got such worldly notions, nor would she ever cease to raise her voice against it. These declarations were generally made to Mrs. Tenterden, who laughed incredulously at any exceptions taken against the beauty who had won her own heart, and affirmed that two young people more in love than Garth and Madge she had never seen—unless it were Golightley and Elinor.

About a week before Christmas, Garth was visited with an idea, which, after he had turned it over in his own mind for a while, he resolved to communicate to Madge. Accordingly he took possession of her as soon as she arrived at Urmhurst, and carried her up to the studio.

"You must help me look over the sketches," he explained, "and pick out those which would be most likely to sell. I shall take them to Boston and sell them to some picture dealer. They ought to bring four or five hundred dollars, at least."

"What could you do with four or five hundred dollars, Garth?"

"At least I could buy a wedding-ring with it," he answered, smiling at her.

"Do you really want me for your wife?" she asked, glancing at him sidelong.

"If you were at the other side of the world, I'd leave everything to bring you back."

"But suppose, after all, I wouldn't come with you?"

"If I found you, you would come."

"Well, perhaps! for you are very strong. But then, I might not let you find me, you know!"

Garth put his arm round her waist with a masterful air. "I have you," said he, "and it will be my fault if I let you go!"

He unlocked the door of the studio, and they went in. The chill and disorder was in unfavourable contrast with the snug aspect of things when Garth had last entered the room, and discovered Elinor on the sofa.

"Oh, how cold!" was Madge's exclamation. "No one has been here since we went out — that's evident!" As she spoke the last words she gave him a covert look, quickly averted.

"Yes, I came up here to lock the door that same night: and by the way," he added, turning to her, "I imagined some one was here when I came in. My lamp had gone out——"

"You saw nothing, then?"

"No; I only had the feeling that I was not alone. Afterwards I heard a sound in the passage, and a noise like a door shutting."

"Dear me! what do you suppose it was?"

"Nikomis, no doubt: either her, or my imagi-

nation. I didn't follow up the adventure, and had forgotten it till now."

"Shan't we have a fire?"

"Yes; I mean to burn whatever we don't pick out for sale, beginning with the five-thousand dollar picture. Next year we'll start fresh, with no relics of the past to drag with us. Sit down there, and see whether my paintings can't make you warm and comfortable for at least an hour."

Madge crouched down beside the stove as he bade her, and Garth tore the strips of canvas off the frame, and with them and some billets of wood soon created a fine blaze, quite sufficient to keep his beautiful companion's fingers from getting cold. Then he collected together all the sketches and studies in the room, piled them on the sofa, and began making his selections, appealing from time to time to Madge for her opinion upon a doubtful specimen. The condemned ones he passed over to her, and she put them in the stove, for the most part without looking at them, and with an air as if her thoughts were elsewhere.

At length, however, she summoned together her wandering thoughts, and asked Garth to give her a pile of sketches to look over and decide upon for herself. He placed a portfolio full beside her, with the permission to burn them all if she liked, and then returned to the sofa.

She took up a handful of them, listlessly looked

them over, and fed one after another of them into the red-hot little maw, that always roared the more insatiably the more it was filled. These gone, she gathered up a second supply. The first drawing that met her eye was a study of the steel head-piece which Captain Neil Urmson had once worn, and which had been reproduced in the picture; this was allowed to add its quota to the now genial warmth of the studio. The second scrap represented Madge's own cottage on the verge of the forest, with a glimpse of the village beyond. After a minute's hesitation, she gave this to the flames also. The third sketch caused her to concentrate her gaze into sudden intensity, and to set her teeth against her lip. After the first look she glanced round at Garth, to see whether he were watching her; but he seemed absorbed in some discovery of his own. She returned to the sketch, which she scrutinised long and curiously. Considered as a work of art, it hardly merited such attention; it was merely a rough and hasty rendering of a woman's head, and neither the features nor the colouring were such as Madge considered beautiful. Nevertheless, she must have been impressed, for her own expression underwent a marked change during the short time she was examining the portrait. In the lower left hand corner was a date—1845—and the name "Dresden." It had then been painted some years ago, while Garth was abroad: he had never shown it to her,

nor ever said anything to lead her to suppose that such a thing could have existed. Why had he kept such a secret?

The incident was, in itself, as unimportant as it could well be; but circumstances, inward and outward, gave it no little weight to Madge's mind. She put herself in Garth's place, with a result not entirely creditable to him; for it is not always charitable to judge others' motives by our own. The effect upon Madge in the present instance was to make her conclusions cynical. But since she was not in the habit of giving her thoughts frank and immediate expression, and since, moreover, it may have better suited her convenience to be cynical than explicit, she kept silence upon her discovery.

"Madge!" said Garth.

She slipped the portrait into her pocket, and said, without looking round,

"What?"

"Do you remember, the last time we were up here, giving me some brandy?"

"Oh—when you fainted away? Yes."

"Where did you get it?"

"It was Nikomis's, I believe. I got it from her room."

"This flask isn't hers, is it?" He held up a silver flask mounted in Russia leather, and handsomely chased. "I found it under the sofa," he

added. "It has the English mark upon it; and a date and initials besides."

"Let me look at it," said Madge, getting up and coming to the sofa. She took the flask and examined it; on the bottom had been scratched the letters "S. K.," and the date 1845. A few moments' reflection showed her that to prevaricate in this matter would be more perilous than to confess. She had anticipated the finding of the flask, but had not been aware of the existence of the initials and date, which made all the difference. It was a situation in which presence of mind was worth more than anything else, and presence of mind was a virtue which Madge had always cultivated. In a wonderfully short space of time, therefore, she took her decision, and the sequel evidenced its soundness.

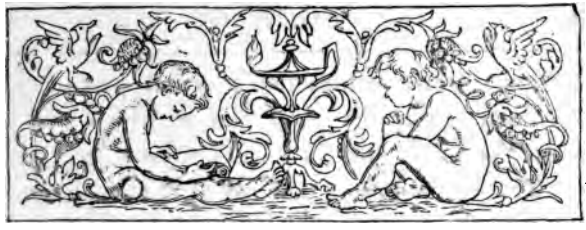
"I will tell you all I know, Garth," she said, returning his inquiring glance with perfect frankness. "Perhaps I should have told you before, but I did what I thought was for the best: and at any rate, I'm glad not to have the secret to keep any longer. Sit down here and listen."

The conference lasted for an hour or two. At the end of it Garth said:

"I'll write to Professor Grindle to-night. You could not have done more kindly or wisely than you did."

His look and tone caressed her with a tenderness

so deep and masculine as well-nigh to impel her to the utterance of those few further words which would have left nothing to be said. But she remembered that little sketch of a woman's head—and turned away unconfessed.



CHAPTER LXXI.

CHRISTMAS PROSPECTS.

WHEN Christmas was still three days distant, there was again a gathering around the broad kitchen hearth of Urmhurst. Mr. Urmson was able, for the first time in three weeks, to leave his room and join the group; he sat in the centre, the high dark back of his chair rising above his clear pale face, which seemed to grow more transparent and spiritual-looking day by day. But the brightness of his eyes, and the indomitable cheerfulness of his bearing, whenever he let himself be seen at all, did much to counteract the effect of his bodily frailty. People are mostly taken at their own estimation, especially if it be such as to let us off easily on the score of sympathy.

Elinor sat beside him; then came Golightley, Mrs. Tenterden, and Parson Graeme. The two

latter had lately contracted a genial partnership with each other, the chief aim of which was to discuss the people and the events of years long gone by. The parson, whose memory of the past seemed to gain in clearness in proportion as his notions of the present grew confused, executed really portentous feats of historic reminiscence; while Mrs. Tenterden came in with a flowing embroidery of minute and detailed information, such as only a lady of much leisure and natural curiosity could ever hope to get together.

On the opposite side of the fireplace sat Madge and Garth, both somewhat taciturn. In fact, as Mrs. Tenterden was just observing, the young people, who had every reason to be chatty and lively, were sedate and laconic as a Quaker meeting; and thereby, she supposed, designed to bring upon herself and others the reproach of senile garrulity. "However, daughter," she added, "I've got something to tell you that I reckon will set the tongues of all of you agoing. I suppose I oughtn't to tell now, though, because it's for Christmas—there! well, since that's slipped out, I might as well say the rest. It's what Christmas present I mean to give you. Or maybe I'll let you all guess!—that'll be best of all!" and the good lady chuckled comfortably and folded her statuesque arms.

But never, apparently, had so poor an assemblage of guessers got together round a New England

hearth, as this. No one had the enterprise to hazard a failure, except the parson, who instantly proclaimed the answer to be, a wedding garment! and thereupon exploded into stentorian mirth.

"Well, you're nearer to it than the others, parson," said Mrs. Tenterden indulgently, as soon as she could make her voice heard. "I never saw such a stupid set as they all are to-night.—Well, then, Nellie, I'm going to give you whatever money is got back from our robbers, whenever they're caught! You'd have had it for a wedding present, if you'd been married before Christmas, and the money had been got in time; and maybe I'd better call it a dowry, anyway; only, as life is so uncertain, I thought I'd speak of it now, so as you might know in case anything happened."

Several members of the company appeared to consider all this more impressive than amusing; but Elinor answered, with heightened colour:

"Thank you, mother; but I shouldn't have minded waiting, though life is so uncertain. A Barmecide fortune is as good one time as another. However, if any one pays me the money before Christmas, I'll consider I have the right to spend it immediately, without referring to you."

"What a pity the robbers, or one of them, couldn't have heard you, Aunt Mildred," remarked Madge. "I'm sure he'd have gone straight off and brought you the money."

"My good fathers, Margaret!" cried Aunt Mildred, glancing over her shoulder with a shudder, "why, I'd rather never have the money than have the awful creature himself bring it here!"

"Even robbers—especially repentant robbers—are a kind of men," said Cuthbert.

"If one of them could have heard you say that, my dear brother, he'd have thanked you!" was Golightley's observation.

"Since Aunt Mildred has been so munificent," said Cuthbert again, "I may as well inform you, Garth, that Eve's legacy belongs to you in default of the other claimant; so unless he puts in an appearance some day or other, you will be pretty well off!"

Madge laughed. "If we could only manage to prove that the claimant was one of the robbers," said she, "he could be shut up in prison, and then both Garth and Elinor would have their fortunes!"

"I don't know that I should care for the claimant's money any more, because he happened to be a convict," said Garth. "But talking about Christmas presents, I have one to propose which we may all give ourselves—a skating-party on the lake on Christmas Eve. It shall be a great affair; all the village, beside ourselves, shall be there, and we'll build the biggest bonfire that ever was seen. The moon is full on that night; and if the ice is good, we ought to have a better picnic than any of the parson's."

This suggestion met with general approval.

"As to that about the ice, though," said Golightley, leaning forward and caressing his moustache; "is there reason to suppose that it is what it should be in view of such an occasion? Anybody been down there lately?"

"This snow fell before the lake froze," replied Garth. "But we can go and find out."

"Happy thought, by George!" exclaimed the other. He sprang up and went to the window. "Ah! what a superb night. Now what do you say to some of us wrapping up warm and going down to-night? Just look at that moon!"

"Mercy, Golightley, you'd all catch your death!" cried Mrs. Tenterden.

But some of the others favoured the idea; and finally the four lovers, as the good lady called them, made up their minds to start. While Madge and Elinor were putting on their wraps, Garth went out and harnessed the double sleigh, and filled it with buffalo robes, blankets, and hot bricks. Then the party got in, and they drove off with much noise and festivity. The moon, shining on the snow, made the woods light as day; and the road had been worn by the sledges of the woodcutters sufficiently to render the sleighing good. They reached the lake without accident; and when Garth had tested the ice and found it safe, they drove forth upon it towards the little islet at the mouth of the cove.

"By George—black ice, too! That beats my experience—eh, Garth?" said Golightley. "It's like driving on air. You might see the stones on the bottom."

"How thick is the ice?" inquired Elinor.

"About nine inches."

"Where is the bonfire to be?" asked Madge.

"On the nose of the island," Garth replied, "so that it can be seen all over the broad part of the lake. If it were in view of the meadows, it would be hidden from the place where most of the people will be. I believe there's a shed on the island which was used by the ice-cutters last year. We can stable the horses in that; and by clearing away the snow a little, we can cook and eat our dinner in the midst of warmth and comfort."

"How is it about fish?" asked Golightley. "Any chance for a chowder?"

"Nothing easier. The lake is full of trout and perch; the women shall catch them through the ice, and I'll cook them."

"It's a paradise on ice!" Golightley declared.

They came to the islet, and passing round the promontory, the panorama of valley, lake, and river lay before them. The river was dammed lower down, and had overflowed its low banks to an average breadth of half a mile; and this polished pathway, like a black mirror twenty miles long, glistened lonely and silent in its white setting of

snow, farther than the eye could trace it. But farther still, Wabeno showed his dim outline against the sky, like the ghost of some traditionary mountain, the material substance of which had long passed away.

"I wish I'd brought my skates!" Madge exclaimed. "The ice is perfect now. Day after to-morrow may not be so fine as to-day."

"Can you skate, Elinor?" asked Garth.

"Hardly at all; but it seems as if I could do anything to-night!"

"And I—since nobody will have the good manners to toot my horn for me—I am the fortunate purveyor of all this delectation," remarked Golightley. "Remember it in my favour, friends, if ever you should have occasion to think ill of me."

"One cannot be expected to carry a December night about in one's mind quite all the time, Uncle Golightley," returned Madge maliciously. "But I'm sure you must know how to skate, Elinor; at all events, you have a lovely skating-suit, and I have been all the last week making one to look exactly like it."

"Aha! so that you may be mistaken for one another, and one of you, perhaps, escape to parts unknown, while her accomplice in the plot delays pursuit until it be too late! I scent mischief," laughed Golightley. "And by-the-bye, Garth, *apropos* of mischief, what has become of your friend

Jack Selwyn? Is his business so pressing that he can't postpone it for a treat like this?"

"There he goes, now!" cried Madge suddenly.

They all looked where she pointed, and saw a figure, faint and far away in the moonlight, skimming across the meadow-ice half a mile below. In a minute or two the figure gained the shadow of a clump of pines on the right, and was lost to view, only the low reverberation of the ice bearing testimony to the reality of the vision.

"It might have been he; he's mysterious in his movements," said Garth. "But I don't know his address. Professor Grindle, though, sent me word this morning that he should try to spend Christmas Day with us. He may get down in time to join us here."

They sat silent for a while, looking at the scene. "Ah, it seems a shame ever to leave this," murmured Golightley at last. "Why can't we be changed into moon-elves, and dance here all night long! Who knows when we shall be so well-tuned again! I declare, I believe I'd walk home if I thought I could get anybody to go with me!"

He glanced at Elinor as he spoke; but she made him no answer. "It seems a pity to lose this so soon," repeated he.

"But we must," said Garth, "since we're sensible people, and not moon-elves, or even lunatics!" He turned his horse with the words, but the animal

slipped, and, in recovering itself, struck the forward sleigh-runner with its hoof, and snapped it.

"That horse has a soul," said Golightley, when the nature of the accident was known. "He heard me mention walking home, so he just put down his foot and said, 'You shall do it!'"

"One of us can still ride," observed Garth.

"Why not two of us?" said Madge. "Have you got your spurs on, Uncle Golightley?"

"No, no! I wouldn't ride an animal that has shown himself such a Christian as Dobbin! You three must fight it out between you."

"I shall walk," said Elinor.

"All right," said Garth, after a pause. "Madge, you and I will ride. It won't be the first time we have been on a horse together."

He slipped the horse out of the shafts, and drew the disabled sleigh under the shed on the islet. Then they all walked across the ice to the mainland, Garth leading the steed. Arrived there, he mounted, and Madge, taking his hand, rested her foot on his, and sprang up behind him: then clasped her arms round his waist, and they galloped away through the glimmering forest. It needed only the parson and the shining armour to render the parallel to their childish exploit complete.

CHAPTER LXXII.

CONFESSION.

ELINOR took her companion's arm, and for a while they walked on in silence; for Golightley was not so imperturbable a wooer as he had once been, and his audacity seemed even less when he and his mistress were alone together, than in company. This subdued bearing of his had been very grateful to Elinor; yet it was of a kind rather to lead her to suspect him of an increase of affection towards her, than the contrary. For, though never obtruding himself upon her, or attempting anything in the way of personal magnetism, as he had not spared to do in the earlier stages of their acquaintance, he now had a way of silently watching her when he fancied her unaware of his observation; of divining and fulfilling her wishes while they were yet in the germ, and of receiving her words with an undemon-

strative reverence, that was flattering because evidently sincere. Nay, he was even a trifle too subservient for her taste, for she was not one of those natures that feels it delightful to condescend; and often she found herself trying to force him into a manlier and more independent attitude toward her, than he was himself inclined to assume. She was doing her best to like him, by dint of resolutely shutting her eyes to whatever might tend to reflect discredit on him; and by magnifying and dwelling upon everything that made in his favour. Such honest effort on her part would scarcely fail, in time, to attain something like success. She was ever ready to defend him against detraction; and when, unwittingly, he had spoken or acted in contradiction of what she considered his better phase, she hesitated not to take his part against himself as well.

At length he broke silence by saying, with some signs of nervousness in his voice and laugh, "By-the-bye, what an odd idea was that of Mildred's about your dowry, wasn't it?—the Barmecide dowry—ha, ha!"

"It may turn out a reality."

"So it may, Elinor—so it may! Stranger things have happened. What should you say, now—but this is only one of my eccentric fancies, you know, such as I'm famous for—what should you say, now, if some strange chance were to bring you that dowry, and at the same time were to—ha, ha!—were to——"

"Were to what?"

"Well, say, were to leave me a beggar!"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, let's put it this way. What if I were a beggar now—by my own voluntary act—and you were the possessor of eighty thousand pounds?"

"I'm not sure that I understand you—unless you mean that you think of settling your fortune on me when you marry, which I should not like at all. But I forget—you were only joking!"

"Ah, my dear Elinor, there's many a true word spoken in jest! And supposing I were to do—or had already done—such a thing as you mentioned, don't you see how it might rather be an act of justice—of conscience——"

"Don't let us waste this beautiful winter moonlight by supposing anything foolish," interrupted Elinor, with something of apprehension underlying the brusqueness of her tone. "There's something I want to ask you. You have never told me where you were going to take me after we are married!"

"I sha'n't have the right to direct our movements, my dear Elinor. I shall be your dependent, living on your bounty——"

"Now, you must attend to my questions!" she interrupted once more, with an affectation of playful rebuke. "I was thinking, if you liked Europe better, I should prefer it on some accounts, too.

We could come back afterwards, you know, if we found it didn't suit us. Don't you think so?"

"Elinor, I . . . by George, I love you too well! If I cared for you now only as I did at first, I might —it might be better for both of us! If you could believe how I repent—if I could feel that you forgave me—there's nothing else I should mind!"

"Is it such a crime to love me?" said Elinor, laughing sharply, and turning her eyes away from the spectacle of his manifest agitation. "I don't know what you are talking about, I'm sure. I wish you would answer my questions about Europe. Don't you think mother would like it better?"

"My God! don't make it so hard for a poor devil. You'll never forgive me, and that's why you won't listen to me! It's my only chance—if I don't tell you now, it will be too late, and you'll think even worse of me than I deserve. I have repented—by George, I have! and made what restitution I could——"

"Wait a moment—stop!" She clung to his arm and pressed her forehead against his shoulder. She was tense and quivering with excitement; he was relaxed and tremulous. In a few moments she steadied herself by main force. "Now will you come home quietly?" she asked. "Remember," she added beseechingly, "we are going to be married! I have not asked to have anything told me. But if anything were said, it could never be unsaid . . . .

I will walk home alone, if you please! I think you must have been—drinking!"

It was an appeal—a final desperate expedient for remaining deaf and dumb. But, intense as was her will not to hear, Golightley was by this time too much unmanned to be restrained. What was in him to say, must out! and when Elinor heard his nervous laugh at her impugnment of his sobriety, she felt the vainness of further struggle. She quitted his arm abruptly, and moved onward, haughty and cold.

"If I only could get you to realise what my life has been—how one phase has developed into another, without my seeming able to control it!" said Golightley, walking beside her in his wretchedness. "It has seemed, by George! as if destiny was always against me. I've always meant well—I can say that! But it has really seemed as if my very gifts—my peculiar fineness of perception, and all that—had helped lead me wrong. If I'd been formed of such clay as other men, I should have done well enough!"

"Do not speak as if I knew anything," said Elinor, with an almost laboured distinctness of enunciation. "I know nothing. Say what is the matter in as few words as you can, since you have begun. Remember—I would not have listened to it from anybody else!"

But it was hard for him to speak plainly and

succinctly, now that it had come to the point. The crookedness of a lifetime made itself felt. He could not help hesitating and temporising on the verge of his gulf, though longing to plunge headlong.

"Ah—you know what a gift I have for finance? of course, everybody knows that. But it was a gift with a curse on it, like the others; I could make anybody's fortune but my own. Well, then—where was I? Oh, when I got acquainted with poor dear John and all of you—you know how highly he thought of me, Elinor, how thoroughly he believed in me? And the good he saw in me may have been there, you know, though with evil mixed with it, of course. Well, I wouldn't take charge of the money—the investments and all that—though dear old John besought me to do it, time and again; and though I knew, too, that the property being actually Mildred's, and she my sister——"

"I know all this: I think you did quite rightly and prudently not to interfere. Is that all you had to tell me?"

"It was just so that you might see things from my point of view. The way I looked at it was, that even if I had taken the management, and the property, by some—some accident or other, you know, had passed into my own possession, still it would have been in the family all the same, and none of you would really have lost anything—in fact, you would have been the gainers, since I could

place the investments where they'd realise a fourth as much again as under poor dear John's management."

"Do you mean to say that anything of this sort happened?" demanded Elinor, slowly.

"Ah—that was the principle of the thing, as the moralists say; and if you only eliminate the accident—it wasn't strictly accidental——"

Elinor stopped and faced him, though her eyes were downcast. She spoke with manifest pain and effort. "Did you—steal—the money?"

He glanced up at her with a blanched, wretched look, his hand feeling about the sidelocks of his hair, and wandering down over his beard.

"It seems a terrible thing to put it that way!" muttered he. "But, frankly, I've never had a moment's peace of mind since then. But I haven't explained to you the—ha, ha!—what the lawyers call the extenuating circumstances. There were extenuating circumstances, Elinor—by George, there were! It was that scoundrel Flint, or Kineo, or whatever his name is, that got me into it!"

"You stole your friend's money—he loved and trusted you so! What must I believe next? Ah, dear me!" She still spoke with painfully lagging utterance, and the last words were a heavy sigh. Then, though with almost unconquerable repugnance, she raised her head and compelled her eyes to rest on him. Such a look, it was more agony for

her to give, than for him to sustain. For he had not appreciated the full ugliness of the crime he had committed. He saw in it an offence against morals, against good taste, and worse still, against respectability; he was miserable at the loss of his prestige in the eyes of Elinor and of the world; and he was poignantly affected by the shame involved in the process of confession. But if everything had turned out comfortably, if his guilt had never been brought to light, and he had been able to enact the part of benefactor and philanthropist with the proceeds of his roguery, it may be open to question whether either his heart or his conscience would have been disturbed. At all events, it had never occurred to him that the knowledge of his degradation might cause Elinor deeper shame and suffering than he himself was capable of feeling.

"I had expected," said he at last, "I had expected you'd at least have given me credit for speaking out before we were married. If you knew what my love for you has grown to be lately, you would give me some credit. I didn't know, frankly, what my capacities for love were until within the last month; and yet I risk the loss of you—by George!"

Elinor began to kindle with indignation: the man had absolutely no thought but for himself. "What credit do you expect?" she asked. "You were a coward to tell me all this! You should sooner have died than insult me with the confession of your

deformity! If you had been faithful even to evil, I might have had a kind of respect for you! But there is no manliness in you! You confessed only when you knew you must be found out at any rate. It was dastardly and insulting! You were afraid I should listen to gossip against you—you thought I was as treacherous as yourself! But you have thrown away the only trust that anyone will ever have in you. I would have believed no evidence but your own!"

"Destiny is against me, or this would be none of I!" said Golightley, with an hysteric sort of bravado.

"I ought to thank you, though," Elinor continued, not heeding him in her passionate preoccupation. "At least, I can believe myself, now! I was right in detesting you when I first saw you. You are as contemptible as you look—that is my comfort! I am glad you are a criminal—I am glad!"

"Oh, Elinor, can't you care for me a little still?"

She turned upon him with that strange uneven glance of hers, which was yet so direct and disconcerting, and with a smile on her lips that made Golightley feel his degradation as no frown could have done.

"That is not reasonable. You are not lovable. How can I care for a man who has spoilt my life, and deceived me into believing evil good, and good evil? I know why you asked me in marriage. After you had stolen your friend's money, you

thought you would steal me for your wife, so that you might say, 'No such great harm was done, after all!' I have no very high opinion of myself, but I will not be the balm of your evil conscience!"

"It isn't merely to make me happy, you know," he said, twisting his hands together. "It would be saving a human soul. Only you could do it, Elinor; and I'm not too far gone to be saved!"

The expression of sarcasm passed from Elinor's face and voice, and sadness took its place. "I have a soul, too!" said she. "You have taken away the freshness from it already. If we had been married, it would have lost whatever else in it is worth preserving. Loving me cannot save you, nor my loving you; you must love truth and honour."

Golightley shrugged his shoulders, and laughed his short empty laugh. "Oh well, so be it! When it comes to fearing the Lord and keeping His commandments, I may account myself done for! So be it. I'll disappear. You may think less despitefully of me some day, my dear Elinor, when things come to be known that are not known now."

"Who will pity him if I do not?" thought Elinor compassionately. But her sense of justice was too true and keen to yield overmuch to the gentler sentiment. Yet she felt that the very fact of having suffered indignity at his hands, had given him a sort of claim upon her. Providence had ordained that their paths should cross; ought she not there-

fore, so far as might be possible, to turn the meeting to good?

"I shall never be what I might have been if we had not met," said she: "but I will not think despitefully of you. I will hope and care that you may do well hereafter, if that will be any help to you."

"I am a beggar, my dear Elinor, too poor even in my deserts for respectable folks to concern themselves about me. All I shall ask of your condescension is that you enjoy your fortune none the less because of the evil hands it has passed through. I anticipated Mildred in her generosity—ha, ha! It is all paid in to your credit in the Beacon Hill Bank—all my share that is to say. What the—ha!—the other scoundrel had, is gone past redemption."

"Has he proofs against you?"

"Oh! you've heard that? He will probably surrender them in consideration of my cheque for ten thousand pounds."

"How can you offer him that, if——"

"Well, the fact is—though I hadn't meant to trouble you with details—that the cheque will not be paid when he presents it."

"You mean to cheat even your accomplice!" exclaimed Elinor, with irrepressible disgust.

"You can deliver me up to the majesty of the law, if that will make you any happier. I deserve it, of course. But my being devoured won't save my friend the accomplice."

"You need not misunderstand me so!" said Elinor, blushing sadly. "I wish no harm either to you or him. But there shall be no more cheating! You have not yet given him the false cheque?"

"It still lacks my endorsement. When he hands me my letters——"

"If they can be got in no other straightforward way, he must be honestly paid for them. Since the money is mine now, I shall pay him."

This proposal took Golightley by surprise, and changed his recklessness into an emotion that brought tears to his eyes. "My dear Elinor—my dear Elinor!" exclaimed he: "I—no no! my safety is not worth that sacrifice."

"Money is not what I most care for," returned she a little coldly. "You asked me to sacrifice myself a few minutes ago. I do this on your sister's and brother's account as well as yours. They would not wish to have you—in prison!"

"If you could have but said it was partly for your sake too! But no—let it go! No one will care. I'll refuse Flint the cheque, and he may keep the letters and do his worst. I have a grain of pride somewhere about me, still, by George! I won't accept your noble and generous offer."

"I shall never be likely to ask another favour of you. You have no right to refuse me this."

"If you'd only say it mattered a snap of the finger to you what became of me!" he broke forth,

with real passion. "You are so cold to a poor devil that loves you! You make him know he has affections, only to freeze him when he's at your feet. A drop of warm human charity would give him life to feel your justice better!"

Elinor began to tremble and catch her breath. "I do not wish to be cold and uncharitable," she said brokenly. "I am all alone; there is no one to be strong for me. I must defend myself in the best way I can. I try to keep the soul God gave me pure and good. It is because I am so weak that I seem so hard. I would be kind, and help people, if I could."

Golightley passed his hand across his face and groaned.

"I begin to feel all I've lost," said he. "Be cold again, Elinor; by George, I can't stand that!"

"I may do it, then?" she asked quickly and timidly. "Where is he?"

After some pause and hesitation, Golightley said:

"He can't be got at, just now. Selwyn and his detectives are on the look-out for him, and he's obliged to keep dark. But I was to have met him in about a week, and then it might be arranged."

There was something so constrained in his manner as he made this speech, that Elinor was not free from misgiving. "You do not promise!" she said.

"Ah—well, the truth is, I—ha, ha!—I was afraid you might not——"

"I will believe your promise."

"Upon my soul, I thank you, Elinor!" He cleared his throat, and strove to recover the jaunty air which he sometimes affected. "Be the oath recorded! Given life and liberty, your commands shall be obeyed! Of course, if I should turn up dead and buried within the next six days, you'd let me off, eh?—ha, ha!"

"I shall believe you," she repeated gently.

They were standing facing each other, a few paces apart; and now there was a short silence. It was broken by Golightley.

"I must stay hereabouts till all's settled," said he, clearing his throat again; "but I presume there'll be no more *tête-à-têtes* for us, so I'll say 'addio' now. Good-bye, Elinor Golightley; may I have been the only pitfall in your path!"

Elinor's sad lips could utter no words; but she drew her slender hand from her muff and held it toward him. He stepped quickly forward and took it between both of his. But he did not offer to kiss it.

In a few moments he relinquished it, and walking onward, left Elinor alone. As she followed in the same direction, she caught occasional glimpses of him at the turnings of the path, where he waited to see that she did not lose her way. But when the forest became more open, he disappeared, and she reached home solitary.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

NEXT MORNING.

NEVER before had Elinor so greatly felt the need of some friend to whom she might tell her trouble, and who would sympathise with her and counsel her; and never had she been so isolated. Mrs. Tenterden, Cuthbert, Garth, Madge,—all were alike impracticable. Whether or not any of them knew or suspected the truth about Golightley, she could not tell; but she felt that she must wait unshriven till the end came, when and whatever that might be. Meantime her thoughts gave her no rest. The night passed almost sleeplessly, and when at length the day confronted her, it came as something to be endured rather than lived through.

Though she had never loved the man who had so disgracefully failed her, yet he had occupied the lover's place, and whatever gentle emotions had

visited her heart, she had felt in duty bound to train towards him; striving with faithful desire to render her observances so generous, that in time they might become spontaneous and sincere. Thus had Golightley represented something real to her, though himself a sham; and when he abruptly ceased to exist (so far as her intents and purposes were concerned), she was as a vine robbed of its support, which, though it was perhaps but an infirm wooden post, had nevertheless stood her in the stead of a marble column. The delicate tendrils of her affections grasped instinctively after something that might take the place of what had been lost. It seems a mistake to suppose that those whose feelings have undergone rude treatment, are less susceptible of fresh impressions immediately, than long afterward. The forlornness of recent abandonment calls out for comfort more urgently than that which time has inured to its condition. Elinor, possibly, had never been in a mood so accessible to the influence of a true and ardent lover, as when, on the morning following her rupture with Golightley, she walked out to take the medicines of air and exercise.

The road she happened to follow led toward the mill-stream, and thence along the bank to the lake. After walking a mile or so, Elinor came in view of a little hut, roughly constructed of unhewn logs and roofed with pine bark. Smoke was issuing from a

primitive sort of chimney aperture at one end; and before the doorway a man was standing with a cigar in his mouth. Upon hearing her step on the snow, he turned quickly, and immediately began to make gladsome gestures of greeting. As Elinor got nearer, she perceived that the man was Jack Selwyn.

"Good morning, Princess!" exclaimed he. "Permit me to rejoice that you have dispensed with your retinue this morning. You were out in force on the pond last night."

"How did you know we were there?" asked she, surprised.

"What! didn't you see the lonely skater? I recognised Miss Madge's voice, I'm sure: and Garth's. And my intuitive perceptions informed me of your presence!"

"Why didn't you join us, then?"

"Oh, five are almost as poor company as three, you know," replied he, smiling.

"Why do you stay here? We thought you were hundreds of miles away."

"I've only been here a day or two. Will you come in and take a look at my winter palace? I have always looked upon you as the Princess in the fairy-tale, and longed to be the fairy Prince who rescues you from some danger, and does the polite generally. I found you asleep once! But come in! it's quite jolly."

The shadow on Elinor's face lightened somewhat as she followed him into the hut; he had the happy faculty of raising people's spirits without reason given or required. The tiny interior smelt of pine resin; a log of hemlock was crackling in the fire-place, and Jack, with great ceremony, offered his guest a seat on the wood pile.

"This spot is historic," he remarked. "Here, many thousand years ago, a youth called Garth built him an enchanted canoe, of birch-bark, wherein, when it was completed, he seated his august form, and sped away down yonder rapids to the lake. Death, having failed to catch him on the journey, gave up the pursuit permanently; and thus it happens, dear Princess, that this same Garth is yet alive. The place has been improved from a mere open shed to a hut, since the era whereof I speak. I find it mighty comfortable. A splendid retreat to study the nature and habits of snow and ice in!"

"Why don't you come to Urmhurst, Jack?"

"Well, for reasons. Changes are in the wind. But erelong, if it please your highness, I shall have strange tidings to impart."

"Oh, don't talk so about it!" said Elinor, suddenly becoming piteous. "I know it all—even more than you do!"

Jack rested a hand on either knee and stared. "What do you know?"

"About the robbery. Golightley himself told me,

last night. And he has given it all back—all he had."

"Golightley told you? Given it back, has he?" repeated Jack, taking up one of his knees thoughtfully, and biting his moustache. He glanced sharply at Elinor, to see what temper she might be in.

"You mustn't feel too much cut up about it," he said cheerfully. "I wasn't sure whether I ought to let you into the secret, long ago, or not. I did give you a sort of hint about it once, you know: I half thought you suspected. But do you really know quite what a scamp the fellow was? Did he remember to inform you, for instance, that the thousand pounds he borrowed of John Tenterden were the means that enabled him to commit the robbery? and that——"

Elinor coloured. "I didn't ask him; I'd rather not know."

"Oh, but you'll have to know some time; and, in my opinion, it's only justice to yourself and other people that you should know. If you go off with the notion that, although he did weakly allow himself to be ensnared by evil counsels, still he might have been worse, and a good deal could be said in his favour, you'd simply be wasting valuable compassion, much better bestowed elsewhere. Now, the fact is, that never was a meaner or more treacherous theft committed than this! Golightley took advantage of Mr. Tenterden's confidential dis-

closures to him, and of memoranda which the poor old man had intrusted to him, to forge an order on His agents, directing them to buy up the whole stock of a certain mine. The purchase was made, and it took all Tenterden's money to do it. Thereupon Golightley and his partner—Flint by name, and Kineo by nature—circulated the reports they had ready, and down went the stock to nothing at all. It was all contrived beautifully, that must be admitted. Well, then these fellows quietly bought it all in, at a hundred per cent. discount, using for that purpose the very same ready money with which Tenterden had just obliged them. That was an artistic touch, wasn't it? But all this time, the mine was not only good—there was nothing better; and as soon as the false reports were proved to be false, up goes the stock again like a rocket, and our two friends realised at what figure they pleased. Luckily, Kineo was sharp enough to get some evidences of the forgery and conspiracy into his hands, foreseeing that he might find them useful some day. So now, you see, the knaves have fallen out, and the honest men—or women, rather—are coming by their own again!"

Here Jack, who had spoken as fast as possible in order to avoid interruption, stopped, and tossed up his fur cap. "I'm glad that's off my mind!" he exclaimed. "Many's the time my very bones have ached with holding it in!"

"I was in no danger of thinking too well of him," said Elinor, with a sigh. "But they are neither of them to go to prison. I am going to get the proofs from Kineo, and burn them."

"The devil you—— how, I mean?"

Elinor explained briefly, Jack listening with keen attention. "You don't mean to say," he exclaimed when she had finished, "that you're going to throw away ten thousand pounds on that——trash!"

"It will not be thrown away."

Jack bit his moustache and frowned: he had his own convictions on the subject. He was wise enough to perceive, however, that nothing was to be gained by a dispute with Elinor, who would be more likely either to dissent from him, or to impose some restriction upon his action, than to be persuaded by him: whereas, if he dexterously changed the topic, he would retain both her favour and his own freedom.

"Oh, that little villain of a Madge Danver!" he muttered, shaking his head. "What a wild-goose she did send me on!"

"Then Madge has known—!" exclaimed Elinor; and stopped.

"Bless your heart, Princess! she has been the arch-conspirator from the beginning. She took counsel with herself betimes as to whether Golightley, Kineo or myself were more eligible for her. But she quarrelled with Golightley, and in me she

was disappointed; as for Kineo, his prospects will at all events be improved when you have carried out your royal purpose of buying the proofs of him."

"Oh—are you sure that——"

"I cannot myself believe," interposed Jack, while his cheeks reddened a little, "small as is my reverence for Master Golightley, that her hold upon him was anything more than a threat of exposure. There must be a limit to the greatest human depravity, you know!"

"But I meant—" said Elinor, colouring also, "about Garth."

"Oh, we're safe in calling that match off, I think. That whole affair of hers with Garth has always been a mystery, though. Mr. Urmson says that she loves him, after a fashion of her own. Sometimes I agree with him and at other times I don't. But whether or not she loves him, I'll bet she won't marry him!"

"Does he love her?" asked Elinor in a lower tone.

"Well, he's bullied himself into believing it, as he has bullied himself into a great many other things. But when she elopes and leaves him in the lurch, he will find himself face to face with a truth which I warned him of years ago, when we were at college:—That he is married to his painting, and that any engagement outside of that would be bigamous!"

Elinor rose from the wood-pile, and stood for a few moments with her hands hanging folded and her eyes on the fire; then she moved toward the door.

"Madge must do no such thing!" she said, turning to Jack with a troubled look. "It would be too sad, after all that has happened. If she wishes to visit Europe, and see beautiful things and great people, she shall go with mother and me. She can be as gay and fashionable as she pleases: it's natural she should wish to be—she's so beautiful and brilliant. I'll speak to her to-morrow."

"You'll find this charity a more extravagant one than the other," ventured Jack, twisting his moustache and eying her gravely.

"Then I shall like it the better," said she, with a passing smile. "This money seems to have had a curse upon it, so far; I don't need it, and I would like to make it do a little good, after so much harm. I don't want to be rich; I should like to live by my violin!"

She stepped across the threshold, out to the sparkling snow and sunshine. Then Jack took his courage in his hands and followed her.

"Princess Elinor," said he, "why do you lavish all your bounty on the rogues, and leave the poor honest fellows out in the cold?"

"Only the rogues seem to need it," she answered, smiling again.

"No—because then I would be a rogue; and I'm not! I've been a good-for-nothing all my life, but I have always reverenced good women, and told the truth to everybody. Can't you give me something too?"

"I'm afraid I have nothing for you," said she, startled.

"Look here! I don't want ten thousand pounds, nor to be gay and fashionable at your expense. All I want is the greatest treasure on earth! and that's you. I love you with my heart and soul. I always have loved you; and I never loved any other woman. Elinor—say you'll be my wife. I believe I can make you happy—I *know* I can!"

"I cannot—O I cannot!" she exclaimed, turning her face away. "I never can be married. I feel as if I should hate the man I married, even though I had loved him before—marriage has seemed such a gloomy thing to me, since I have looked forward to it at all. It seems like going to prison!"

"But to be my wife shall be coming out of prison! I know it was wrong to ask you so soon after this fuss; but I won't be impatient; I'll give you forever to think it over in! at least, I'll give you as long as that fellow in the Bible had to wait—seven——months, wasn't it?"

Elinor laughed ruefully, pressing the point of her foot into the snow.

"I won't try to persuade you on the ground of

the difference it would make to me," continued Jack, "because that would keep me talking here all the seven months. But you should be as much mistress of the world as a man can make you who has seen the world and worships whatever part of it you stand on. After a while, even if you didn't find much of anything to admire in me, you would have associated so many jolly things with me, that at last you'd count me in as one of them—almost without meaning to! Do say, at least, that you won't begin with saying No!"

It was not easy wholly to resist this pleading—not the words so much as the manner of it. Jack was so immeasurably in earnest, so heart-and-soul in what he was saying, his face and voice expressed so much more than his sentences, and the vigour of his desire made itself so strongly felt, that Elinor, though she had been all No when he first opened the subject, could not at once say no when he had ceased. And why should she say it—at once? The ardour and utterness of his devotion touched her, coming, as it did, at the season of her greatest loneliness. No doubt but the marriage would give her a scope and freedom of life such as she might not otherwise easily attain: perhaps, too, it offered opportunities for generosity and unselfishness, which a solitary existence would lack. Why say no—at all?

Again, she was not called upon for an immediate

or positive answer, either one way or the other. She was to be allowed time to question and scrutinise the new idea on all sides, and to pronounce upon it at her leisure. All that was asked now was, that she should not say No. She had always liked Jack, the impact of whose vigorous and manly nature was an unspeakable relief after the clamminess of Golightley. And Jack had—unconsciously—used one argument which sank more deeply into Elinor's heart than any of his deliberate ones: "Garth is married to his painting!" Then, what need for Elinor to be over-solicitous about her destiny?

All this while Jack's bright hazel eyes were searching her face, which was turned downwards. When she lifted it at last, he drew himself up like a soldier in presence of the enemy. The colour sprang to his cheeks.

"But you do not know me!" said she faintly.

"If we'd been married a century, I could not say 'I know you!' There would still be a thousand new—lovelinesses to learn! But I love you!"

"You say too much. I have nothing to give you. I don't love you, and I'm sure I never can. It would spoil a true friendship if you try to make it anything more!"

"Whatever you do, don't think of friendship!" exclaimed Jack with great earnestness. "There never yet was a true friendship between a man and

a woman! But just stand still and let me love you! Don't move!"

"I don't know that it's worth while for me to care what becomes of me——but that's an ungracious thing to say! I like you so much that—I feel sure we were not meant for each other!"

"But don't say No! whatever you do, remember that!" He came one entreating step nearer.

"I won't say it then—now. But," she added hurriedly, for the delight that leapt into Jack's eyes frightened her, "it will make it harder for you and me if I must say it hereafter. But at any rate you shall see me, and know something about what sort of a person I am; and then, perhaps, you'll thank me for not having said Yes!"

"All I'm afraid for is, that one of us may die—for this is too good to be true! Elinor—Elinor—Elinor!—No, don't be scared! I mean to be as subdued and circumspect as a Duenna. But a Duenna may kiss the Princess's hand just once!—Elinor, don't you think seven weeks is a very long time?"

"Oh, Jack!" she said, panting and turning pale; there was genuine dismay in her eyes and voice. "Remember this is not a promise—not an engagement!"

"No, of course not, else I'd have—not kissed your hand! But it was only by accident that I said seven months. You know those Bible fellows

lived hundreds of years, and we have left only forty or fifty at the outside."

Elinor could not help laughing, though there were tears on her eyelashes. And so they parted for that time.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

TWO OLD CRONIES.

EARLY in the afternoon of the same day, Madge left the cottage, and set off toward Urmhurst. She walked along with a somewhat pensive mien; occasionally looking up and about, and then again falling into reverie. She was pale, but there was brilliance in her eyes extraordinary even for her; and such a deliberation and stateliness of movement as might indicate a great bracing-up and dilation of the spirit within. On arriving at the house, she mounted at once to the garret; for Garth, as she knew, was not at home, and there was no one else to question her proceedings. In the garret she remained for more than an hour. On her return downstairs, Golightley met her in the hall. He had on his hat and coat, and accompanied her, with his usual affability, on her road towards the village.

"There is an enterprising air about you this

morning, Miss Maggie," remarked he. "Are any fresh projects in suspense?"

"None that concern me, Uncle Golightley. But I believe Mr. Kineo would like an opportunity to say good-bye to you, before he goes."

"Ah! I presume he desires to rid himself of those —ah—documents, does he not? Well, I shall drop in on him this evening, I think."

"From what I understood, I don't think he means to let you have them until after he is quite sure that they can be of no further use to him. His idea seems to be, that if you had the documents before he got his cheque cashed, and was on his way to Europe, something might happen to hinder his getting away."

"H'm! he doesn't expect me to——h'm!" Golightley caressed his cheeks thoughtfully, and murmured inarticulately to himself as he stalked along. "If our friend has become so cautious," he continued at length, "or has taken such cautious advice, Miss Maggie!—as to mistrust my good faith, the only result would be to defeat the prosperity of both parties. He must know that it would be impossible for me to draw that amount of ready money myself, for in order to do it, I should be obliged to go to Boston; and just now there are guardian angels abroad, who might misinterpret my intentions in making such a journey. As to his anticipating any hindrance after our bargain is

settled — anything of that sort, you know — he simply cuts his own nose off if he's ass enough to suppose it. And he certainly can't expect me to let him keep the documents until he has cashed the cheque and taken flight! With every respect for his sound memory and conscientiousness, that would——eh?" Uncle Golightley brought forward his side locks and laughed.

"I shouldn't imagine he would expect anything so unbusinesslike," returned Madge composedly. "But might not some compromise be made? For instance, suppose he were to hand the documents to some third person, who would give them to you on receiving word from him to do so?"

"Ha, ha! an admirable scheme, my dear Margaret, with only one objection to it, which is—the difficulty of finding a *fidus Achates* of both parties; one whom I could depend upon to hand me the documents when my honourable friend sent him the necessary permission; and whom my honourable friend could trust to keep them from me until the aforesaid propitious moment arrived! I must confess that I should be at a loss where to put my finger upon such a treasure of a confidant!"

"Yes; but I believe," said Madge, glancing at him from the corner of her long dark eye, "I think such a person has been found!"

Golightley stopped caressing himself, and pressed on his eye-glasses.

"Who is it?"

"It's Garth, I believe."

"You believe it's——*Garth?*" He fetched a long breath and retained it for several seconds: then drew his brows together and threw up his chin. "Well, I don't!" he declared; and brought his hands together with an emphatic clap.

Madge laughed lightly. "I was afraid you wouldn't—that is, that it would surprise you at first. Poor Garth seems so innocent, and slow to see things. But the most innocent-seeming persons sometimes turn out to have been quite acute. At all events, Garth knows all about your affairs and Mr. Kineo's, and has known for some while. And he has called on Mr. Kineo at his lodgings, and they have made all arrangements. It was on his account that Garth got up the skating-party for to-morrow—so that he might be able to skate away down the meadows without any one's suspecting him. And it is Garth who will take charge of the documents for you, Uncle Golightley."

"When does Kineo propose delivering them to him?"

"Oh, Garth has had them several days."

Golightley paused to recover himself. "If that be the case," he rejoined, "I shall take the liberty to keep my money in my pocket! I begin to think it must be my honourable friend Kineo who is stupid!"

"Not quite so stupid as that!" answered Madge, laughing again. "Of course he didn't let Garth have the documents for nothing. Garth paid him fifty thousand dollars in bank-notes for them yesterday; and you are to give him the cheque you were to have given Kineo—and more too, I'm afraid!"

"H'm! upon my word, this is interesting! By George, Garth is coming out!"

"You see, Garth found out, among other things, that Sam was heir to the Eve Legacy; so he wrote to Professor Grindle for it."

"But it strikes me," interposed Golightley, "that the Professor is too good a business man to give up that same legacy without proof positive that it belonged to the person in whose behalf it was applied for."

"That same thing struck Garth—wasn't it curious!" rejoined Madge with a smile. "So, as I happened to know where the certificates of his mother's marriage and his baptism were, I got them, and Garth sent them on with his letter. Professor Grindle found them legal, and sent them back to us with the money. Only, that is a secret, because only Nikomis and I know where the certificates are kept, and I borrowed them without her permission."

"I think I could make it worth somebody's while to show them to me!" remarked Golightley, with a significant look.

"Oh, they are quite safe—nothing can happen to them; and Sam, I know, is very fond of calling himself your nephew; more so, I think, than Garth is!" said Madge, with an engagingly confidential air.

"Well, by George! I feel sat upon," exclaimed Golightley, with a rather ghastly attempt at a humorous grimace. "My projects don't look especially brilliant, do they? But I ought to thank you for the confidence you have shown in me in giving me such an amount of private information. Suppose, now, I had got a little bit nervous and anxious, and had gone and told my friends, the guardian angels, that a dear nephew of mine was starting for Europe on such and such a date, by such and such a route; but that he was apt to be very heedless and flighty, and would they please take care that he reached his proper destination?—What if I had been such a fussy old uncle as to do that—eh?"

"Ah, but I knew you were never fussy, Uncle Golightley," returned Madge, with an arch glance. "You never will be until you have those documents of yours to take care of; and then your nephew will be beyond the guardian angels' reach!"

"Ah! *belle dame sans merci!* You don't leave me a loophole, do you? Not one, not one, not one! Well, now I suppose you will marry Garth, and settle down here quietly; happy and contented in

the care of your hens and cows, cheerfully busy with the housework and cookery; and, in the evenings, bringing out your spinning-wheel or your knitting, and sitting with your lord and master before the kitchen fire! A lovely idyllic picture—two souls possessing perfect confidence and satisfaction in each other! I suppose, by-the-bye, that Garth had no impolite questions to ask you, as to how you came to be so well informed on all these obscure points, and as to your reasons for not having confided in him until now? Nothing of that sort, eh?"

"There was no need for him to ask me such questions, Uncle Golightley," replied Madge, with dignity. "You speak almost as if I had anything to conceal from him! Of course Garth knows that whatever information I had came to me accidentally, through my intimacy with Nikomis; and that I had not told him about it at first, because he was ill, and because I had hoped that things might be arranged so that the family name need not be disgraced. But when I found that nothing could be done without his help, there was nothing left but to ask him for it. He trusts me perfectly; why should he not? Does not Elinor Golightley trust you?"

Madge could not have known what would be the full effect of this last stab; it may have determined Golightley to a course of action as to which he had hesitated until then. He made no reply, however,

though his face twitched and grew whiter than before. But when, soon afterwards, he had left her and struck off through the woods by himself, he murmured more than once, "There is one loophole, Miss Maggie; just one!"

CHAPTER LXXV.

MUTUAL COURTESIES.

HIS course now led him towards the point of junction of the mill-stream with the lake. Although he had never, thus far, been interfered with by any of those "guardian angels" whereof he had spoken to Madge, yet he could guess pretty accurately where they might be found, and doubted not that it would be easy enough (should he feel so inclined) to have speech of one of them. He may not, however, have been aware that Selwyn himself was already returned; and it was therefore an equal surprise to both of them, perhaps, when they presently met in one of the more secluded forest by-paths.

Jack was in such high spirits from his morning's interview with Elinor, that he would probably have greeted even the devil with magnanimity, had that personage happened in his way; and since Golightley

had lost what Jack had gained, and was furthermore in a fair way to get full measure of retribution for his misdeeds, the younger man was disposed to be forbearing. Accordingly he bowed with grave politeness; and perceiving that Golightley had something to say to him, he stopped.

"A fine afternoon again, Jack; I'm in hopes this weather will keep on over to-morrow. I see you've returned from your trip in season to join our picnic on the ice."

"Well, I've not quite made up my mind whether to go."

"Ah, really? Your arrival seemed so opportune——"

"I hope it may prove so."

"The fact is, my dear Jack, I don't believe we shall be able to do without you! Have you heard —have you heard the latest developments concerning this robbery business?"

Jack looked at him attentively, wondering whether the man could be meditating some evasion even at this stage of affairs.

"I'm open to instruction," said he.

"It's a philosophic virtue, I believe," observed the other, "for a man to know when he's beaten; and I'm free to admit that I am a very good philosopher, as far as that goes. But I presume even philosophers have their weaknesses; and mine is, not to be philosophic on any one's account but my own. Now,

to proceed to the point at once; our friend Samuel Kineo, alias Flint, who (as you are most likely aware by this time) is on a visit to his grandmamma in the attic of Urmhurst, proposes to leave for foreign parts to-morrow evening, with ten thousand pounds ready money in his trouser-pockets, to pay his travelling expenses withal."

"I conceive you, sir!" said Jack sarcastically. "Having given him that sum in exchange for the power he held over you, you are now desirous of defrauding him of his hard-won earnings. Very astute, and just what I should have expected of you! But are you correct in saying that he holds ready money, and not a cheque, which might or might not be worth more than the paper it's written on?"

Golightley laughed. "Well guessed—well guessed, my dear Jack! but you are out for once. Very likely I had intended something of that sort, but I've been forestalled. I haven't got the documents, and some one else—my nephew Garth, namely—has paid the ready money. That money, of course, is the Eve Legacy, and is, or was, the last scrap of Urmson property left from my ravages. Garth, wishing to save the family honour, and all that sort of thing, dumps it into Kineo's pockets, gets in return the inconvenient documents, and then recommends my fellow-outlaw to be off as fast as his skates can carry him."

"That's news, certainly; where did you pick it up?"

"From the young lady who, as I take it, contemplates sharing the rewards and perils of Mr. Kineo's future career,—unless, indeed, she has contrived a way to outwit him, as well as the rest of us, which is always possible! She confided the secret to me, you understand, on the assumption that self-interest weighs a few ounces more in my balance than is actually the case. By-the-bye, I may as well tell you that, some few weeks since, I paid in to the account of the lady who was to have been my wife, the sum of eighty and odd thousand pounds. It's all I had, except a trifle, to—keep me in gloves and cigarettes for a month or so!"

The tone and manner of this reference to Elinor smote Jack with compassion. In Golightley's preceding utterances had been perceptible only the jaunty bravado which strove to disguise, however flimsily, the shameful squalor of exposed rascality. But in mentioning her who, to him as well as to Jack, was the first and dearest of womankind, his voice had turned hoarse, and the haggard lines in his face had seemed to deepen. "If the fellow really loved her," said Jack to himself, "to have lost her is more than enough punishment for meaner crimes than his. Heaven knows I'm far enough from deserving her myself!"

"Look here!" he continued aloud, planting him-

self face to face with his interlocutor, "I don't see but what you deserve some credit for this hint. Of course, I see that it gratifies your spite to block Kineo's little game, and of course you rely on Garth not to use the proofs against you, since you've already given up your share of the booty to the proper owners. Still, you do risk something, and I've no right to suppose that your chief motive is not to save your brother and Garth their fifty thousand dollars. And I'll be damned if I'm not sorry for you, any way! What do you mean to do with yourself, if you get out of this scrape?"

"Ah, well—*absit odium*, my dear Jack, but you must allow me to say that that would be my own business!"

"I know. But I had a reason for asking.—Confound it, look here!" said Jack, with some embarrassment, "I've got more money than I know what to do with—what would you say to my shipping you off to Australia?—my people have got a place of business there—and putting you in the way of making a good honest living? You can make a new man of yourself there, in every sense of the word. What do you say?"

"It's kind of you, Jack, by George!" answered the other indifferently. "But the fact is, I'd thought of a longer jaunt than that—or rather, I hardly think I'm up to that kind of thing now. You see, I've given it a pretty fair trial—this campaigning

about at other fellows' expense, you understand—and I'm tired of it! I don't seem to have the stuff in me; talent enough, but it doesn't seem to work out in the right way. No—no, I'm afraid I shouldn't do your introduction much credit. I'm pretty well tired out—I'm pretty well tired out!"

"Oh, while there's life there's hope!" returned Jack; but he could not help acknowledging to himself that Golightley's words were true. Everything in the man's appearance testified to an exhaustion of moral and mental resources almost beyond hope of remedy. "Well, think it over," he added, "and we'll speak of it again next week. Probably we'll be able to let Kineo off in the end, after making him hand back the legacy, so he won't stand in your way. I should like to give you a lift if I can."

Golightley stood silent awhile, looking abstractedly first in one direction and then in another, and settling and re-settling his eye-glasses on his nose. Then, appearing all at once to recollect himself, he lifted his hat to Jack and said:

"Till next week then!—by-the-bye, what was it? . . . ah, yes—kind of you, very kind of you, by George! Till next week then, Jack—Auf Wiedersehen! as we said in Germany." And with a wave of his hand, he passed on.

Jack continued his walk in the opposite direction, pondering over the new aspect things had taken.

"Poor old Golightley!" he murmured; "there doesn't seem to be much left of him, sure enough. His mind has taken to running on two or three subjects —and not particularly agreeable ones, I fancy— until he hardly hears or remembers what is said to him on other matters, even when they especially concern him. But that was a happy thought of mine about Australia, if he can only find the sense and pluck to take it up.

"But to think of dear old Garth, my genius, whom nobody ever suspected of the power to awaken from the reveries of imagination and idealism—actually making a practical man of affairs out of himself, and concocting a plot to bring things right without asking leave of anybody. Well, no doubt he might beat any of us at our own game, if he chose to put his mind to it. The plot would have worked beyond a doubt, but for the incalculable contingency of old Golightley's butting against himself. As for me, so far from turning out a success in my amateur detectiveship, I've simply been cajoled and bullied about like a raw schoolboy. I've found out very little that wasn't plain beforehand to anybody, and what I have found out hasn't helped me do anything. Then Madge must pack me off to Canada, like a political exile, with that hocus-pocus of a letter of hers; and there I might have been to this moment, hunting for phantom Kineos in snowdrifts, if an accident hadn't

revealed that I was turning my back on what I was after. It's no thanks to me that the scamp didn't make off long ago; that must have been what Madge intended; but I suppose the rogues fell out, between the three of them, and let the opportunity go by while they were busy quarrelling.

"Well, then, here are Elinor and Garth, both with their scheme all arranged independently of each other and of me, and Garth must actually have had an interview with his ruffian of a cousin—God save the mark! I expect he'll punch my head well for interfering with his plans; but it would never do to lose the legacy in that way. Besides . . .

"Look here! of course he can know nothing of Madge's rascalities? No—these geniuses, who can see through stone walls if they only will look at them, can be blinder than dead men when they choose not to see. She could make him believe what she liked about herself with half a word; and after all there's nothing definite against her; nothing to be sworn to—only sworn at! ha, ha, ha! By jingo, it's a shame for me to be giggling here about these things; but I'm so confoundedly happy on my own account, I should giggle at a funeral! Well, if Miss Madge will only start on an elopement to-morrow evening, it will at least have the good effect of averting Jove's anger from my own head, when I intercept and bring back the erring pair. . . . Hullo! behold him, in his habit as he lived!"

In fact, Garth was in view, walking rapidly with his head down, and making slashes at the snow before him with his stick. He was close to Selwyn before noticing him.

"Jack! I thought you were in Canada!" They shook hands.

"Who told you I was in Canada?"

"Madge."

"Did she tell you who sent me there?"

Garth smiled. "Well—it was to keep you out of mischief!"

"Just as I thought—she's been telling him a lie!" thought Jack; for his friend's light treatment of the matter was not otherwise explicable. "And no doubt she represented me as a busybody, which I am!—You'd like to have me back there, then?" he demanded aloud.

"No; you can save me trouble, since you are here. Sam Kineo is to escape to-morrow-night, by way of the long meadows. You can take care that nothing gets in his way; and be sure you do it!"

"Ha! my lord is imperious. Will he deign to remember that I serve, not his interests, but those of his betters?"

"I have the means of unloading my unhappy uncle to the last farthing. I shall do substantial justice, without the injustice of publicity."

"Listen to the autocrat! Might your slave petition for a guarantee?"

"Take my word, Jack!"

"The sublime assurance! I wonder whether there is a single thing in this world which Garth Machiavelli Urmson does not know! Methinks, not one!"

"I know that you and I are of one mind on this matter—and that I am in a hurry! You'll be on the lake to-morrow?"

"I know that it's lucky for you I happen to be in an extraordinary good humour. But I shall not appear on the lake to-morrow; if your new *protégé* is to have the bars let down for him, it is not in common decency that I should make myself personally conspicuous in doing him that service. And—hold on! I must tell you the occasion of my good humour, lest you attribute my complacent behaviour to poltroonery. Elinor Golightley has half promised—or maybe three quarters—to do what do you think?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"We have hit upon the one thing that he didn't know! and now he shall be told that also. Why, to be my wife.—Oho! interested at last, are you?"

The expression of Garth's face, and his entire bearing, had in a moment undergone a great though indescribable change. His lips parted; his eyes seemed to grow smaller; he leaned heavily on his walking-stick. But before Jack could speak again, he said slowly:

"I never was more surprised. There's nothing for which I ought to be more glad." He held out his hand. "I didn't even know that she and my uncle were parted yet. Jack, I'm glad for you with . . . all my heart!"

With the last words he gripped his friend's hand so forcibly that the latter winced. "You've got your muscle back, if not your cordiality!" he said, laughing. "But as for that affair with Golightley—of course she never cared for him: and I, happening by good luck to come upon her at the right moment—O Garth, dear old curmudgeon and friend of my earlier days! I am so happy! *absit invidia*, as poor Golightley would say, but you'll never be so happy, with all your genius. But I mustn't give you the idea that she has actually promised yet, because she hasn't, and thinks she never can, and so forth; and—mind you—I wouldn't have opened my head to any one in the world besides you about it; but you and I, you know . . . Oh, do be enthusiastic, can't you? I would for you!"

Garth laughed, stretched his arms and shoulders, and yawned! But when he saw a shade of disappointment on Jack's handsome face, he said, with the deep-toned tenderness which he rarely threw into his voice:

"I feel your happiness so much, Jack—that's why I don't say more. You know I was always a dumb

beast. But you can't say so much for yourself as I can feel for you !"

They parted, each going his way. Jack was appeased.

"Can the same Creator have made that man and his uncle ?" he asked himself admiringly.

BOOK X.

GARTH.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

GETTING UNDER WAY.

GARTH was up early on the morning of Christmas Day, and went out to the barn to have a word with the cows and horses. Many changes had occurred in his world since that October morning of his last recorded visit; there were new friends, new enemies; but after all, these animals greeted him with the same brute sincerity of kindness now as then. They did not sympathise with him; they did not pity him, nor hope nor fear for him. They did not honour his pure resolutions, nor share his anxieties, nor respect his principles. Yet they did love him, after their own fashion and upon their own grounds; and the positive and palpable assurance of this fact gave Garth strong and deep satisfaction. He gazed

in their calm faces with eyes as serene as theirs; there was no need to hide his trouble from them, and therefore his trouble took wings and flew away for a time. Peacefully they gazed at him, with just enough recognition of what he was to be pleased with him; and he gazed back, until he could almost identify himself with the sweet, soulless animal nature. Blessed is it for the world that only man is dowered with a soul! If moral experience and responsibility descended below him in the order of creation, the earth would be a more intolerable purgatory than any that Dante or Swedenborg has told us of.

So Garth lounged amidst the stalls and mangers for a luxurious hour or two, and thought that the longer he lived within the realm of kine-land, the more loth he should be to bid farewell to it. At last, however, it became necessary to get some breakfast, and prepare for the events of the day; and he reluctantly put on manhood again and returned to the house. Kineo had already been instructed as to the course he was to pursue and the precautions he was to observe, so there was not much to do besides packing provisions in hampers and baskets, getting fishing-lines in order, and heating indefinite numbers of bricks to the scorching point for the benefit of tender feet and hands. When everything else was ready, he harnessed two horses to the double sleigh (which had been healed

of its late wound), and leaving them at the door, with their blankets on, went upstairs to bid his father farewell.

"I shall be thankful to have a day to myself," remarked Mr. Urmson, in answer to Garth's regret that he must be left solitary; "or rather, to have the privilege of spending it undisturbed with the select society of the last two hundred and fifty years!" and he laid his thin, graceful hand on the piled-up manuscript of his history. "I expect to be amazingly refreshed by the time you return."

"You certainly look better to-day than you have lately," said Garth. "The Professor will say so when he sees you to-morrow. By the way, since you will probably have fallen asleep before I get home to-night, I'll wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, now. Many of them, father!"

"Thanks, beloved Hottentot! But to tell the truth, I hope you'll keep the happy New Year for yourself. I have had as many as I can hold—quite as many as are good for me. Although I am still the parson's junior by some few winters, it can be said of me—when the time comes—'he died full of years!' It takes very much fewer years to fill some people than others: and Providence has made my capacity somewhat limited."

"No, no!" said Garth, speaking the words with an indrawing of the breath. He sat down beside his father; his throat ached and his eyes filled

"How I love him!" he thought. Then he looked enviously at the strength of his own youthful limbs and shoulders; with all his love he could not give away an hour's use of them! How almost omnipotent is man's spirit: how impotent his flesh! Why were such unkind mates yoked together?

"I can do nothing for you!" said Garth. "I would do anything!"

"Come, be a good boy!" exclaimed his father with playful severity. "Else I shall think that I have been able to do nothing for you, though I have been willing to do a great deal!"

"I shall be—alone, if you go!"

"Who said I was going, yet awhile? I mean to live quite as long as you or anybody else can find a use for me. Didn't you just tell me that I was looking better? As to your being alone, I doubt whether Providence will have the heart to condemn you to such poor company; you don't seem to me so entirely depraved as to require such discipline. No, old gentleman, I believe you will find the New Year a happy one, before you are at the end of it. I'll venture that prediction. Now get out, for there comes your grandfather's sleigh!"

"I wanted to tell you something," said Garth, pausing and looking at his father. "But I'll wait till to-morrow. You will be at leisure then?"

"Yes, I shall rest to-morrow. Farewell, beloved

Hottentot! Give my love to Mrs. Tenterden and—Elinor."

When Garth got downstairs, he found the Reverend Mr. Graeme in his sleigh, with Mrs. Tenterden, Elinor and Madge.

"I won't keep 'em all, Garth lad," boomed the parson with titanic glee. "You can take one of 'em; and fill her place with your best hamper. Golightley," he added, as that gentleman made his appearance at the door, "I guess you'd better hop in with Garth—he's got a double team and I haven't. Don't be afraid, boy; we'll hand over your belongings to you when we get there—haw, haw, ho!"

As Garth helped Madge to alight, he noticed an unusual pallor in her face.

"You look tired," said he.

"I am tired. I was doubting whether I'd go."

"Perhaps you'd better not. You know the party is not for pleasure, though we pretend so."

"I've a great mind not to go!" she murmured, looking wistfully at him. "I'll leave it to chance! Let's pull straws: if you draw the longest I'll stay."

She held the straws, and Garth drew the longest.

"You stay!"

"It's absurd! I won't be kept back by a straw! I'll go!" she exclaimed, laughing.

"If you wish to come home early, I'll come with you."

"Oh, if I go I shall never come back!" was her answer.

When every one was seated, and the baskets and hampers securely stowed away, Garth gathered up his reins and asked the parson if he were ready?

"Any one else for the lake?" bellowed the reverend gentleman, directing his inquiry at the darksome front of Urmhurst.

"What a pity Mr. Selwyn didn't come!" exclaimed Mrs. Tenterden. "He'd enjoy it so, and he's so lively!"

"All the lasses are taken up, so far as I can see!" rejoined the parson, mirthfully. "The young man would be lonely, ma'am!"

Elinor felt a painful embarrassment. When changes have been rapid and violent, they appear dreamlike in the immediate retrospect. Was Golightley really for ever disconnected with her future? Had she really listened to Jack, and half yielded to him? If so, why must the old appearances, now vacant of life and truth, still be observed? Why was it that the forms of the social world must always be under the control of the more shallow-minded and short-sighted? Mrs. Tenterden and the parson represented the conventionalism of society, before which all individual tumult and emotion must be still. They saw according to the letter, not the spirit; and for their sakes all that was real and living must be disguised and stifled.

As they drove away, Elinor happened to catch

Garth's eyes, and fancied she discerned a smile in them—though whether of sympathy or of irony, or of something else, she could not decide. Be it what it might, she flushed resentfully, and thereafter sheltered herself behind a haughty reserve; which, perhaps, was the best attitude of which the circumstances admitted.

Sam Kineo, who had heard the parson's stentorian query, and had mentally responded to it, crawled stealthily to the attic window, and peeping forth, saw the sleighs disappear amidst the naked forest.

"I'll give them a surprise to-night!" he muttered to himself, as he gazed after them. "If they think I'm going t' sneak off with my tail between my legs, they're mistaken! Those village fools shall have a sight of Sam Kineo before he goes! If 'twasn't for that pretty little she-devil of mine, I'd let 'em have something more than a sight—curse 'em all! but she can't fight 'nd run, as I could; never mind! we got the best of 'em all; 'nd Garth 'll find I took the interest on my legacy, before he gets home to-night!" Solacing himself with these reflections, Mr. Kineo withdrew to his bower, and began the preparations for his departure. He felt that his star was once more in the ascendant, and longed to celebrate the occasion by doing something memorable. Had he not recognised that the success of his ultimate escape and immunity was dependent upon his forbearing to commit any intolerable out-

rage, he might have been tempted, in the gaiety of his heart, to set Urmhurst on fire, or to take terrible advantage of the loneliness of Mr. Urmson. But he felt that such indulgences would be not merely foolhardy, but suicidal; especially as in Nikomis he had a suspicious and vigilant overseer. He had never succeeded in appeasing the resentment of this grim old witch, who might have served him so well; and it had been owing chiefly to her that his departure had been so much delayed. He therefore resigned himself to inoffensiveness, tempered by the determination to make up for it whenever circumstances should give him a chance; and in this mood he lit his pipe, opened his organ-box, and gave his attention to the selection of an outfit for his journey.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

MEANWHILE the party arrived at the lake, it being then about noon, and found a multitude of the village folks already in possession, and flying hither and thither over the ice in all directions. Having reached the islet and stabled the horses, Garth began the construction of the big bonfire, and sent a dozen or so of the younger gentry in quest of faggots and kindlings. They accepted the job with enthusiasm, one small boy, with a huge red tippet wound round his head and body, showing himself especially energetic and untiring; he was a member of Madge's Sunday-school class, and was perhaps stimulated to such exertions by a secret passion for his mistress. In a short time there was material enough collected to last throughout the day; and Garth, having built up a lofty superstructure of scientifically adjusted

twigs, boughs, and fragments of decayed stumps, took some paper and a match from his pocket, and deftly set the whole pile on fire. "That ought to burn well: the kindling was good!" he muttered to himself. And it did burn gloriously. There was no wind, and the flame rose straight upward, until it ended in a thick column of smoke which might have been visible twenty miles away. The buffalo robes and blankets were now brought from the sleighs, and seats were arranged for Mrs. Tenterden and the parson, where they might at once keep warm and have a view of all that was going on. Golightley, although he had brought with him a highly ornamental pair of foreign skates, with some kind of patent fastenings, declined taking an active part in the amusement; he remained near the fire, replenishing it with fresh fuel from time to time and responding to the sallies of his two companions.

Madge, as she had foretold, was dressed in a costume which closely copied Elinor's, insomuch that at a short distance one might easily have been mistaken for the other. Madge, however, was an accomplished skater, while Elinor could do little more than move about, with no attempt at curves and flourishes. Skating had not at that time such vogue among women as it has since acquired; but neither then nor since have there been many who could show such graceful mastery over the art as Madge. She loved it as she loved dancing, and it

displayed her physical beauty and adroitness to at least as good advantage as did the latter exercise. Moreover, she was as tireless on her skates as she was skilful, and could keep in motion for hours at a stretch, without any appearance of fatigue.

Garth, likewise, had complete command over his motions upon the ice, and the compactness of his figure enabled him to perform evolutions which were the despair of many a longer-limbed rival. When he and Madge skated off together, therefore, there was a general disposition to applause amongst the beholders; and the small boy with the red tippet was generous enough to ignore unworthy jealousy, and give utterance to his unselfish admiration in a cheer. Not being, however, so familiar with the mysteries of poise and balance as with the exercise of the nobler emotions, his cheer whirled him over backwards, and bumped his head unmercifully. When the throes of physical anguish had subsided sufficiently to allow of his sitting up and taking conscious note of earthly things, he descried Madge far away, swinging in easy curves, regardless of his pain. His heart swelled within him as he gazed; from manly pride he had forborne to weep thus far; but there are bumps and bumps! As he tottered dejectedly to his feet, and scrambled away toward solitude, salt tears were freezing upon his cheeks, and his heart was embittered against the seductions of Sunday-school.

After Garth and Madge had made the circuit of the lake, they paused where, at its southern extremity, it merged into the river. Presently she said:

"Garth, will you take my hand, now, and skate down there, away and away, as far as we can see—ever so far beyond Wabeno? and then get on board a ship and sail to Europe—oh, Garth! and live there? Will you do that with me?"

"If we had the Eve Legacy, we might!"

"Well—what if I did have it, in my pocket, now?"

"If this were the first of the New Year, instead of Christmas Eve, you might have had it—that is, if Kineo had not come. His right to claim it would have ended with this year."

"Then I wish he had never come! But Garth—it is not too late! Let him be taken—both of them! It would be right! and then we should be free! Will you, Garth Urmson?"

She spoke with a sudden flash of excitement, that made Garth's own blood tingle. What she suggested might be done, and public opinion, justice, and the law would bear him out in it. And he and Madge needed freedom: how easy to grasp it! The world would lie before them—for a time, at least; all that was irksome in the ties that held them to each other, would be forgotten in the warm flood of the life that they might live. Madge's hand was in his; her look was upon him; she awaited his deci-

sion. On his next words hung their future. He wheeled about; she saw the light in his eyes.

"You will do it!" she cried, in a low tone of triumph. "That saves me!"

He paused a moment; then the light sank back.

"I won't do it!" he said, harshly and abruptly.

The harshness was not for her, but for his own infirmity; but she could not know that. Their hands dropped apart: her vivid face darkened.

"You are a strange creature, Garth Urmson. You think every one has rights but me. Heigho!—Well, let us go back, then. It's time you were at work, catching your fish."

They skated back to the islet slowly and in silence; and for the next two hours Garth worked like a Titan. First, with the sharp ice-hatchet that he carried at his belt, he cut a score or so of holes through the ice, twenty feet apart, in straight rows. Beside each of these he set up a little rod, made of the twig of a birch tree, with a line attached to it, whereby a baited hook was let down to the depths below. These preparations being finished, the fun began. Wherever a rod bent, the fisherman to whose charge it had been intrusted must grasp the line, and haul up whatever was at the other end of it. Women as well as men took part in this sport; even Mrs. Tenterden laughingly permitted herself to be established beside one of the holes, though she was too busy with being amused at the exploits

of others to pay any attention to her own business. Fish were plentiful, and before long more than enough for the chowder had been caught, chiefly perch and trout. At length word was given to pull up all the lines; and it was not till then that Mrs. Tenterden was heard to complain that she thought hers must have got caught in something: the rod had been broken down, and only saved from being drawn under by falling across the hole, in which position it stuck fast. Garth took hold of the line, and perceiving at once that something unusual was the matter, hauled away with all his might. In a few moments out flounced a huge pike, three feet long, which snapped its horrid jaws at Mrs. Tenterden in so bloodthirsty a manner, that the good lady sent forth a scream which brought everybody on the pond pell-mell to the spot. When the cause of her alarm became known, there arose a multitudinous roar of laughter; amidst which Garth attacked and slew the "sockdolloger," as the parson called it, cleaned it, and flung it into the chowder-kettle.

When the chowder was cooked, it was ladled out into tin bowls, and so handed round to be eaten with iron spoons. Garth took his seat by Elinor, and they chatted together about diverse indifferent matters, until he said:

"Jack Selwyn is the only friend I ever made, and he tells me secrets he would tell no one else.

I saw him yesterday, and he told me what I was glad to hear, for your sake as well as his."

"He did not say that I—we——"

"No, no! he didn't magnify his hopes. You will find it possible to be kinder to him than you think you can be now. He loves you; and when you know him better, you can't help loving him!"

Here there was an interruption, and Elinor was left to her reflections. That Garth should have congratulated her on the new step she had taken, affected her oddly. It was as if some one from whom, by a desperate effort, she had escaped, had suddenly appeared beside her, serene and kind, and given her joy on the success of her attempt. She wondered whether he would have spoken so calmly had he known what others knew about Madge: she wondered—even while taking shame to herself for so doing. Perhaps he did know: evidently he was aware of his uncle's guilt, and so why not of other things? But again, what was said of Madge might not be true; the worst part of it, at least, might not be. She and Garth might fully understand each other. Who could say? and yet—Elinor could not bring herself to believe it!

At this point, however, she was reminded of the promise she had made to herself the day before, bearing upon this very matter. If Madge—supposing her to have formed any such scheme as Jack had imputed to her—could be persuaded to relinquish it

for that which Elinor had to offer, might not all be well between her and Garth even yet, and Elinor the cause?

Ah! but the task was a hard and ungrateful one, and Elinor, now that she was face to face with it, could not help shrinking. She lacked the flow of persuasive speech which seems to render such intercessions easy to some people; and here she might hesitate on other grounds than those of personal unfitness. Not only would it in no way help Elinor's interests to meddle with Madge; but Garth (if the opinion of those who knew him best could be trusted) might be the worse instead of the better off were Madge secured to him. Was it not more reverent as well as more prudent to let Providence work out its own ends in its own way, without any impertinent interference?

Elinor would have been glad to have felt satisfied of this. But the more she strove to be so, the more persistently did certain stubborn questions force themselves upon her. If Madge were ruined for lack of any argument or effort which Elinor could have used, would not the responsibility lie at Elinor's door? Did not all women owe a sacred duty to their sisters who were in peril? Was any earthly gain or loss worthy to be set against that duty?

Elinor got impulsively to her feet, and looked about her. Madge was at some distance upon the ice, teaching the small boy with the red tippet the

mysteries of the outside edge. Elinor came up behind them and said to her:

"Won't you give me a lesson, too?" and took her other hand.

Madge looked surprised and on her guard, but offered no objection, and they skated off together, leaving the boy again forlorn.

"You see it's very easy," Madge observed; "but I suppose you don't have many chances to skate in Europe?"

"Not many. Would you like to go to Europe?"

It was several moments before Madge answered,

"I mean to go, some day!"

"But would you like to go soon—with us?"

There was another pause; Madge let go Elinor's hand and glided along beside her with a serpentine movement.

"Does your future husband authorise that invitation?"

"I meant, with me and Mrs. Tenterden. I have not told you that we have got back most of our fortune. I shall not be married."

Madge swept about and looked in Elinor's face. "So Jack Selwyn has let out the secret, has he?"

"It was Golightley who told me, Madge."

"But what a funny invitation!" rejoined the other, with a soft laugh. "Is this to part Garth and me? or is Garth to be of the party? or—would not Garth do without me?"

Elinor flushed with indignation, and was half resolved to leave Madge to her fate. But her better will still overcame.

"I thought you might like to see the world before you were married. We could bring you to the things and people that would give you most pleasure. You should go where your beauty and talent would be best acknowledged. It would be better than for you to go in—in almost any other way!"

"But why do you ask me?" repeated Madge coldly.

"Oh, Madge! because you are a woman, and I am a woman: and no other woman knows what I know about you—what I found out by chance. I want to be a sister to you, if you will let me! I have felt what it is to be alone and in trouble——and in temptation! I longed for some one who would speak to me and be kind to me. And though I can do so little for you, Madge—still, if you will believe that I speak from no selfish motive, I might do something!"

Madge's expression abated somewhat of its hardness and incredulity, and she said more gently:

"You have never seemed friendly to me before."

"I know it—I was wrapt up in myself. And you never seemed to need a friend before. I do want to be your friend now!"

Madge cast down her eyes and was silent. But suddenly she looked up and asked:

"Ought I to marry Garth?"

Elinor hesitated: was Madge testing her sincerity? But even to gain her end she could not prevaricate.

"Not unless you love him," said she.

"Come!" said Madge, holding out her hand again. Presently she continued, "You do seem honest; and if you are honest, you are very kind! But you mustn't think I would do anything foolish—put myself in any one's power. Perhaps I don't mean to marry Garth: but then, I know now what I did not know a month ago—that he does not care for me! He would marry me from a sense of duty—which I hate! I don't expect to die of a broken heart about it; and yet I don't believe there's another man in the world so well worth loving as Garth Urmson! Don't forget I said that, Elinor!—But I'm not fit for him. He is all that I admire in a man, but he is so much more besides, that my part is crowded out of sight. So I should be happier with a lesser man—one more like Jack Selwyn, maybe! only Jack happens to hate me (he has some reason to) and to be in love with somebody else. Can you guess with whom?"

She smiled as she put the question, and added immediately, "But don't have him, Elinor!" Then she pressed her hand a little closer and said hurriedly:

"I will prove that I thank you for having wished to be kind to me. I will tell you a most precious

secret. 'Garth Urmson loves you—he has loved you ever since he first saw you! You must do the rest."

As she spoke the last words, Madge curved aside with a graceful impulse, and was gone. Elinor stood overwhelmed with thick-crowding thoughts. She needed to be alone. But all at once a voice close behind called out:

"Miss Danver!"

Elinor looked round. It was the small boy.

"Oh, you ain't she!" he exclaimed, staring. "I guessed you was Miss Danver! Want her to learn me some more outside edge!"

He scrambled away disappointed. Elinor now reflected that Madge had returned no definite answer to her proposal. Did she mean to refuse it? or was she revolving the question in her mind? Elinor looked across the surface of the frozen lake, glistening beneath the pink light of sunset clouds, but the beautiful skater was not in sight.

"She shall sit beside me as we go home," was her thought, "and then I shall know,"

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

SONG AND FROLIC.

THE sun had by this time gone down, amidst a splendid wilderness of crimson and gold, scarlet and green; and though the moon had risen, dusk came on apace, for the sky to the east was clouded. The great bonfire was soon the centre of illumination; its red light gleamed along the ice, and the shadows of those who stood near it stretched out in dark rays, until they were blended with the outer gloom. And out of that gloom figures came gliding up swiftly, and away again; like strange beings from another world, making themselves visible for a moment in the light of this, and then vanishing forever more. As the night still deepened, the surrounding darkness seemed to creep nearer, growing ever vaster and more mysterious to the imagination; so that the great roaring bonfire was none too great or too

ardent, since it was the only source of life and warmth left to mankind.

At length Golightley made a request that Elinor should sing. It was almost the first time he had addressed her that day—a fact which Mrs. Tenterden had observed, and she had not spared to rally Elinor and him on what she called their lovers' quarrel. Nor did she fail laughingly to regard this request of his as the first step toward a reconciliation. But to Elinor it had another meaning. Golightley had always shown unbounded admiration for her powers of song; and now, at this last moment, as it were, of their being together, he was asking, for a parting gift, that only part of her which she need not hesitate to grant him. There was something pathetic to her in the petition; and as she prepared to fulfil it, what remained in her heart of bitterness toward him passed away, and womanly compassion alone was left.

She stood up beside the fire, and with her hands folded in her muff and her eyes upon the darkness, she began one of those sweet, pathetic ballads which delight uncultivated ears as well as those that know true music. As she sang, a semicircle of auditors collected on the ice before her, continually augmenting in numbers, until every skater on the lake was there. A wide open space was nevertheless maintained between her and them; and every sound except the singer's voice was hushed. Presently

Elinor noticed, in the front rank directly opposite her, the small boy in the red tippet, with his hands in his pockets and his mouth wide open. Golightley, she knew, was standing not far away on her right, his face shaded by his hand. The others of her party were behind her—save that twice or thrice, and on each occasion in a different part of the semicircle of listeners, she caught—or fancied that she caught—a glimpse of Madge.

The song came to an end; but in the pause and silence which followed the last verse, a new and strange figure suddenly swept upon the scene: as wild in his aspect and movements as any night-goblin of fairy lore. In figure he was tall, symmetrical and athletic, and his graceful proportions were well set off by the close-fitting fur-trimmed suit he wore. Round his waist was twisted a scarlet silken scarf, whose long fringed ends waved outward as he moved; and there was a bunch of scarlet feathers in his cap. His black hair hung below his ears; his face was swarthy, and appeared, in the uncertain light, to possess a sombre and saturnine kind of beauty. Such an apparition had never been seen on the lake before; and the group of auditors, now changed to spectators, with one accord widened out, so as to leave him ample space in which to cut his strange fantastic capers.

Certainly it can seldom be the lot of human eyes to behold such unearthly gambols as were here dis-

played. The mysterious skater seemed to be superior to ordinary physical laws. Freedom and boldness are not terms competent to describe the amazing recklessness with which he tossed himself to and fro, in and out, now backwards now forwards, weaving inextricable patterns and wheeling out swift circles, all with as much inimitable poise, ease, and finish as if he could lean upon the air and be supported by it. Meanwhile the red firelight and the black shadow played over him so bewilderingly as to render any deliberate scrutiny of him impossible. To many who saw him he was a presence half supernatural, and no one seemed to know whence he came or wherefore.

"Good mercy, what is it?" exclaimed Mrs. Tenterden at last. "I declare it looks like a wild creature!"

"It's the champion skater of the world!" replied Garth, who had been watching the exhibition with an expression of mingled annoyance and amusement. "Do you wish me to present him to you?"

"Good gracious alive!" cried the lady, drawing her ample shoulders together with a shudder of dismay; "it would just scare me out of my life! Why, I'd as soon think of being introduced to a mountebank in a circus!"

While this short conversation was going on, Elinor, who had remained standing precisely where

she had first taken up her position, saw Madge press through the outer ring of onlookers, and beckon to her with head and hand. Fearful of she knew not what, she slipped quietly aside, and skirting along the exterior of the groups, came at length to the point at which Madge had appeared. But Madge was no longer there.

Just then the unknown skater, who heretofore had been as voiceless as he was mysterious, gave utterance to a wild, ringing yell, at the same time urging himself at dazzling speed round the limits of his arena. The unexpectedness of the outcry and action caused a kind of panic; the ring broke up in confusion; and almost immediately the skater was nowhere to be found. Elinor, however, had seen him a moment later than most of the others. As she stood alone a little way out upon the lake, looking vainly for some sign of Madge, she had felt her arm suddenly seized, and on turning, found herself confronted by the swarthy, sinister, handsome face, with its red-feathered cap and long black hair. Before she had time to feel alarmed, he had turned quickly behind her and made off; and but for the impress of his long fingers on her arm, she might almost have taken the episode for a swift hallucination. Be it what it might, it did not lessen her anxiety on Madge's account, and she still continued her search for her, passing to and fro, sometimes coming within range of the firelight, and again

returning to the shadow. Often it seemed to her that she recognised the familiar grace of the lost figure swaying in easy evolutions a long way off; but when she reached the spot, either the appearance had vanished, or it turned out to be some other than Madge. Had Mephistopheles snatched her away with him into irredeemable darkness?

At length, after nearly quarter of an hour's absence, she returned with growing apprehensions to the fireside. The parson was relating some humorous incident of seventy years ago, to which Mrs. Tenterden was listening with good-natured chucklings: Garth had gone to the shed to give his horses a feed of hay, and what had become of Golightley no one knew.

"Why, daughter, I thought he'd gone off with you, to finish up the reconciliation," said Mrs. Tenterden. "I should have been after you myself, before now, if I'd known you were alone, and that wild creature rushing about!"

"I've been looking everywhere for Madge," returned Elinor impatiently. "Have you seen her lately?"

"Maggie? why yes, to be sure I have!" was the comfortable answer. "She was out there in plain sight not three minutes ago, and we've seen her, off and on, ever since that horrid creature went away."

Greatly relieved by this information, Elinor sat

down on a buffalo-robe beside the fire, and began to realise, for the first time, how tired she was. The fear of danger being removed, she could rally herself on the folly of having admitted it. An air of comfort and security dwelt within the little circle of firelight, entirely inconsistent with any evil apprehension. Thus five minutes passed away. Then, all at once a thought flashed into Elinor's mind that brought her to her feet with a start. Garth had just left the horses and was coming toward her. She led him a little way out upon the ice.

"Have you seen Madge?" was her question.

"Yes—before I went to feed the horses."

"Who was that—who was skating here?"

"Oh—you mean the champion skater of the world?" said he, smiling.

"Was it Sam Kineo?"

Surprised by the vehemence of her manner, Garth admitted that it was. "He is gone now," he added, "for good! But it was to have been a secret, and had better be kept awhile longer. It was a piece of his melodramatic nonsense, showing himself in that way. We had especially arranged for him to get off secretly."

"I'm afraid something has happened," replied Elinor, with a trembling which she could not repress. "Madge's dress and mine were alike,—I'm afraid you mistook me for her. I looked for her everywhere and could not find her. If——"

"Well, I guessed you couldn't be Miss Danver this time!" exclaimed a voice beside her—the voice of the small boy. "I guess even she couldn't skate quick enough to be back here 'fore I was! She was going t'other way, too!"

"Have you seen Miss Danver?" asked Garth gently, of the small boy.

"Yes, but she's far enough off by this time, I guess," he replied, tucking his chin inside the fold of his tippet. "I see her; she was with that skater chap with the red feathers in his cap. They was goin' it, I tell yer! Way down there—way down 'long the river!"

He scrambled away. Garth had pulled on his gloves, and settled his cap upon his head. He and Elinor exchanged a look, brief and eloquent.

"Shall you take no one with you?" she asked.

"No: and do you say nothing. If I can't do it alone, there is no help. Get the people home soon. Good-bye, Elinor!"

"Good-bye; God help you, Garth!"

She stood listening to the ring of his flying skates until the sound was no longer audible, and he himself had long been swallowed up in the gloom. Then she returned to the fire, faint and sick at heart.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

GRIM EARNEST.

THE sky was overcast with great clouds, but at intervals the moon looked forth between the rifts, and filled the valley with cold radiance. Garth, as he swept with flying strokes toward the south, peered intently into the grey night before him; but the changes from shadow to light, and back to shadow again, were more perplexing than constant shadow would have been. It was unlikely that he would see those whom he pursued until he was close upon them; and, the overflow of the river having broadened it to nearly half a mile, he had to guard against the risk of passing them.

He moved with great velocity, what wind there was being behind him, and the ice perfectly smooth: but he knew that the conditions were as favourable for the fugitives as for him; and besides their long

start, it was certain that Kineo, if not Madge, could skate as fast as he. On the other hand, they might not expect the pursuit to begin so soon; and since they must travel all night, they would be apt to spare themselves as much as possible.

In former years, Garth had often skated down this valley from end to end; and as he now mentally rehearsed the route, he recollected that at a certain point, about nine miles below the lake, the dead level of the meadows was interrupted by a ridge, lying at right angles to the river, and through the midst of which the current had forced its way. Here, of course, the stream was narrowed to its original width, and flowed with such rapidity over a rocky bottom, that ice was rarely formed even in the coldest winters. At this place, known in the neighbourhood as the Bite, there was a wooden bridge, the only one for twenty miles; and here, Garth hoped, there would be a delay, if not an actual stoppage. He was now, as he calculated, about three miles behind the fugitives: but if he could maintain his present pace, there was some chance that he might come up with them either there, or a short way beyond.

As he sped onwards, his mind involuntarily busied itself with a review of his relations with Madge from their first beginning. If, as it was hard to doubt, she was a willing companion of Kineo's flight, the plot must have been arranged, in one

form or another, long ago. They must have been in communication, not only since the half-breed had been concealed at Urmhurst, but during all the years of his absence abroad; and that being granted, then their intimacy, even in childish days, must have been far closer than Garth had ever imagined it to be. In that fight of his with Kineo, which was the opening act of his long love-drama,—must he believe that Kineo, and not he, had been in the right? Recalling each one of Madge's well-remembered looks and words on that night, they now wore a new aspect and significance. Had she been false even then? Had he been made a fool and a laughing-stock all his life long?—The blood burned in his cheeks at the thought, and his eyes sought fiercely through the gloom. The hour of reckoning had come! He flew onwards like the very spirit of retribution, and the hollow ice resounded beneath his steel-shod feet.

Hitherto he had not considered how he would deal with the fugitives when overtaken: but now the question arose whether Madge, having dared such a step as this, would return at his command? or whether Kineo would easily relinquish her? Garth, however, was not in a mood nicely to balance doubts and probabilities. All the imperious, relentless temper of the hot-hearted Urmsons was throbbing within him. Vengeance was his—he would repay!—or if God's, then was he God's chosen in-

strument! There should be no parleying nor pitying; of that there had been too much already. As for Kineo, he had come to the end of his tether: his punishment should be quick and final. Any other man than Garth would have said, "Either I or my enemy must perish!" But Garth did not admit the alternative. The might of his passion made him invulnerable and irresistible. He could not perish until he had worked his will. He felt in his belt, where hung the small sharp ice-hatchet, which he had that morning used for cutting fishing-holes. It was his only weapon: but his purpose was deadly enough without any weapon. Kineo should die: and Madge, who had tempted mercy until there was no mercy left,—she should not die; but she should be brought back, and held up to the shame and scorn which were her due. As Garth swept forward with heightened speed, he cursed these miles of barren ice that hindered his revenge! But he would have it, soon or late. Had not his forefathers defied fate as he defied it now, and conquered?

But what had they conquered? or what had the conquest gained them? Garth's own father had warned him—In their victories they were cursed! Should Garth be cursed so, likewise? Had he dreamed, that night beside the spring, to no better purpose than now to cast aside the grim lesson of the Urmston generations, and stain himself also, the

last of his race, with blood? Should that old murderous demon triumph over him, as it had triumphed over the rest, and make the blot which had thus far marred their name, eternal? Were his mother's love and trust to be thus justified? and had all his boyish struggles and self-discipline brought him to this—that he must stand before his father to-morrow with murder on his soul?—As he cleft his way onward through the cold still air, two spirits seemed to move beside him, on the right hand and on the left. One wore the mien and features of the Puritan ancestor whose hands had set the granite threshold-stone of Urmhurst above the Sachem's grave; the other spirit showed the lineaments of Garth's mother.

Who could say that Madge, at the worst, had been always and altogether false? Had she never striven to be true? and if so, had Garth been always blameless for her ill-success? Even that afternoon she had urged him, with a vehemence which now he could comprehend, to take her hand on that same journey which, to-night, she was beginning with another. Even so lately she had hesitated in her purpose, and had needed only sympathy and encouragement to have drawn back. But he had answered curtly and harshly. And if he had been unsympathetic then, how many times had he been so before? Those years of his in Europe—were they guiltless of what was happening now? And those long months of dulness and delay since his

return, when he was paltering between right and wrong, action and inaction—during that time how many golden opportunities to woo and win her had slipped away? Was he not man enough to be at once all she desired, and all he desired for himself? If not, was it strange that Madge, vivid and restless, should have fled from one so paltry, selfish, and one-sided? He had worn her out and driven her away, at the very moment that he was hugging himself for his virtue in keeping faith with her when his heart was elsewhere! Did he well, then, to be angry because the cup himself had filled was held to his lips?

Onward still he swept, and the pace must have quickened, for that spirit of the old Puritan was now outstripped! Blessed were the barren miles of ice that had hindered his revenge! Nor were they barren, since they had brought forth this fair fruit in him. He loosened the hatchet from his belt, and swinging it from right to left, sent it thence whizzing and spinning far across the glassy surface. "I'll get her, if God pleases," he said aloud; "let the devil's part go!" But Providence knows many ways of saving; and that which seems the speediest is not always so, where wayward human souls are concerned.

Nearly an hour had now gone by, and the moon, looking down through a cloud-rift upon the long-drawn icy surface, marked the shadows of three human figures hastening along it, two in advance

and one pursuing: and the space between pursuers and pursued grew constantly less and less. At length the latter, being within about four hundred yards of the old wooden bridge, came to a standstill. The buckle of the man's skate-strap had given way, and he knelt to repair it. The woman, after restlessly watching him for a while, threw herself down on the ice near by, and gazed back toward the place whence she came. Suddenly she crouched low and laid her ear against the surface; then leapt to her feet with a low exclamation. She had heard the ring of steel, approaching fast. The man, too, arose with a curse, holding one skate in his hand.

"Give me the money—quick! it's you they're after!" said he.

"It is Garth!" said Madge, half in a whisper. She lifted her clenched hands to her face and pressed them against her cheeks.

As the pursuer emerged out of the grey shadow and saw his quarry, he struck the heel of his skate into the ice with a harsh grinding sound, and brought up between them, breathing deep, his brow moist with sweat.

"I'm come for you, Madge!"

She stood silent, mechanically clasping and unclasping her hands. Kineo, after glancing up the river, took his stand in front of her.

"It's man to man here. We'll settle this, Garth, once 'nd for all. Let her stick to the winner!"

Garth seemed not to see him. "Come, Madge!" he repeated. But as he moved round towards her, she retreated, silent, her eyes upon his face.

"Let her alone! she's always been my girl!" said Kineo, with an oath. "She only amused herself with you till I was ready for her!"

Then Madge spoke. "He tells the truth, Garth. He kissed me that day at the picnic, years ago, though I denied it. And that night when you ran the rapids, I was going with him—only seeing you changed my mind. But I sha'n't change any more: I shall not come back. You needn't be anxious about me, nor regret me. I'm glad you know me for what I am, at last! I liked deceiving you at first, but I'm tired of it now. I'm going where I can be my real self."

There was no passion in the girl's tone, but a fatal apathy, as of one with whom all moral struggle was definitely over. She did not avoid Garth's look, but rather sought it with a kind of listless directness that was appalling. The truth that she had spoken, ugly though it was, had the power inherent in all truth. Madge had never been stronger than at this moment of frank degradation.

Garth had no arguments; he could only put forth his will, of the strange force of which he himself was perhaps but partially aware. "Come!" he said to her with the quietness of intense resolve

and though she still shrank back, he glided forward and laid one hand upon her wrist.

As soon as she felt his touch, all strength seemed to ebb away from her; she sank down on the ice and bowed forward, relaxed and nerveless. Her very eyelids drooped, as though heavy with drowsiness. Vigorous as she had been to escape, she was powerless to move one step in return. Garth could stop her flight, but his will could not compel active obedience. It could deaden, but not vivify.

He knelt beside her and strove to rouse her; but she only sank yet lower, averting her face. Kineo laughed jeeringly.

"You let that woman alone now, Garth Urmson, 'nd get up 'nd fight like a man! or by the devil, I'll brain you where you are!"

Garth turned, and looked grimly up at him, but said not a word.

With a sudden snarl of rage, the half-breed raised the skate which he had been holding in his hand, and dashed it in Garth's face. The steel blade struck his chin and cut a deep gash there. Madge started to her feet with a piercing scream. Kineo, staggering from the violence of his own throw, slipped and fell. In an instant Madge had stooped and snatched the knife from his belt, and put it in Garth's hand, as he still knelt on one knee, half dizzy from the blow.

"Kill him!" she whispered through her set teeth.

But Garth stood up, grisly with blood, and flung the knife away.

"He had his grudge to pay," said he, frowning. "But I came for you."

It seemed as if she must yield, or drop before him lifeless. Kineo was getting to his feet again, but there was no help in him now. Garth was master.

All at once there was a shout, and the resounding of ice from the direction of the bridge; then other shouts, coming nearer. Madge held her breath to listen; she recognised Selwyn's voice. Quick as thought she turned to Garth.

"Don't let me be shamed before them!" she whispered hurriedly. "Let me go back alone, and be there before you—then no one need know! Garth—may I?"

The men were near; there was no leisure to deliberate.

"Go!"

She lingered yet a moment. "Say you forgive me!"

He looked at her without speaking; his face was ghastly to behold; but she thought she saw what she had asked for in his eyes.

When Selwyn and his men came up, Garth and Kineo were standing there alone. Garth looked at Jack angrily.

"Is this what you promised?" he demanded.

"I took pains not to promise, old blood-and-thunder! But——is that the whole convoy?" He pointed to Kineo.

"That's all!"

"Why, then," exclaimed Jack cheerfully, though not until after a moment's pause for consideration, "so much the better! Truss him up, boys!"

"Let him go: I am responsible!" said Garth.

"I'm not going!" snarled the half-breed, with sullen malignity. "You've put up this job between you. You want to get rid of me now that the woman's cleared off with the money! But I'll let 'em hear who I am 'nd what I know. You've got me, 'nd now you'll keep me!"

"Oh, anything to oblige you, if you feel sensitive about it!" returned Jack with a laugh: and the prisoner was secured accordingly.

* * * * *

Madge had skated northward a quarter of a mile; then she swerved aside to the left, and in a hundred yards reached some low clumps of bushes on the verge of the ice: behind these she crouched and waited. By-and-by a solitary skater came by; it was Garth, hastening to catch up with her. Even then, so profoundly had his determination swayed her, it was almost by main force that she kept herself from calling out, or following him. But he passed, and she had made no sign. She watched

him with wide-open, straining eyes, until he had faded into the night, and out of her sight for ever. After that a dull interval elapsed; the little group of the prisoner and his captors went by; but she had no eyes for them—her face was hidden in her hands. At last she arose, and fled swiftly toward Wabeno, and toward the world beyond, which she loved so well.

CHAPTER LXXX.

BROTHERS.

AS soon as Elinor had ended her singing, Golightley, without waiting to thank her, or speaking to any one of his intention, had set out on foot for Urmhurst. There was a kind of solemn alertness in his bearing, different from his manner during the last few weeks. He seemed to take pains not to let any of the wintry beauties of the night escape him; several times he paused to watch the clouds drift across the moon, or to observe the black tracery of the branches against the sky. Once he picked up some snow, made it into a snowball, and aimed it at the trunk of a tree thirty paces distant, repeating the effort until he hit the mark. Occasionally he would pull off his hat, and let the night air breathe upon his forehead; and at two or three points of the route he stopped to look about him, as one might do who wished to

impress upon his memory a scene he expected not to see again.

At length he stood before Urmhurst, and looked up at its darksome front, which seemed to frown forbiddingly upon him with its overhanging brows. Two of the windows were alight—those of Cuthbert's study, and of the kitchen. Peeping through the latter, Golightley saw an oil lamp burning on the table, but the room was empty. He passed round to the back of the house, entered with as little noise as possible, and lighting a candle, descended into the cellar. The floor was the bare earth; the sides were walled with brick, built in between ancient joists of oaken timber. He made his way between a medley of empty apple-barrels, superannuated farming implements and other rubbish, until he reached the southern end. He was now standing directly beneath the Urmhurst doorway, and on the other side of the brick wall in front of him was the Sachem's grave.

He set down his candle, and with a broken trowel, which he found lying near, began to loosen the bricks from the square space between four intersecting joists. They came out readily, and after about a dozen had been removed, he took his candle and peered into the black cavity beyond.

Nothing was there but some brownish, crumbling fragments, which might once have been bones; and, arranged amidst them, a number of quaint little

objects of Indian origin—medicine-bags and other such mysterious votive offerings—none of which had been there when Golightley last inspected the place, more than a quarter of a century ago. These were all; the thing which he had come after was gone. Evidently, the same hand which deposited the medicine-bags had carried off the sacrilegious pewter warming-dish, with its contents.

A month ago Golightley would not much have cared whether the triangular parchment were lost or not. But latterly, the world had changed for him; and he needed it, not as a power, but as an apology and a justification: and it seemed more desirable to him for the latter purposes than it had ever been for the former. It was useless to think of hunting for it, however; and equally vain to hope that the person who knew where it was would tell. Most likely, indeed, it had been destroyed. On that night, three months ago, when Golightley had told his ghost story to the circle round the kitchen hearth, he had been half minded to destroy it himself. Something that Madge had said to him, after the story, had suggested the idea that she had made a shrewd guess as to what the triangular parchment might be; and several keen innuendoes which she had let fall since then, had pointed the same way. But other matters, of greater temporary importance, had made him comparatively indifferent to this: and now it was too late. Viewing her hints in the

light of this disappearance, it seemed manifest that they were the issue, not of conjecture, but of knowledge. Nikomis had found the parchment, Madge had seen it and read it; but neither she nor Nikomis had known how it got in the grave, until Golightley's fireside narrative had explained the mystery.

"Confound my stupidity!" he muttered to himself. "It's not destiny, though I've always said it was; it's my own stupidity, by George, that's beaten me!"

As this wholesome conviction entered his mind, he heard the door at the head of the cellar stairs open. Some boards were leaning against the wall near at hand; he crept behind them, and snuffed out his candle with his fingers. Peeping through a crevice, he saw Nikomis come hobbling along, holding the light above her head, and mumbling to herself. She stopped within two paces of his hiding-place, knelt on the ground, and brushing away a layer of earth and rubbish, lifted up a square bit of planking which had been concealed there. Out of the hollow thus disclosed, she took the well-remembered pewter warming-dish; and unfastening the false bottom, three papers fell in her lap. One of these was the triangular parchment.

The veins in Golightley's forehead swelled as the old witch took it up and turned it about between her dark knotty fingers. Should he blow out her lamp (he could easily do it, for it stood quite near

him), and then trust to the chance of being able to seize the parchment and make his escape in the darkness? To his relief, however, the Indian decided the question by replacing the precious document in the dish, and putting the dish itself back in the hole, which she covered over as before. The other papers she stowed away in the folds of the blanket she wore; and so got to her feet and hobbled away, her frosty breath showing mistily in the light of her uplifted lamp.

When all was dark and silent once more, Golightley lighted his candle and thankfully repossessed himself of his treasure. At another time he might have regretted losing the other papers, which were doubtless the same that Madge had yesterday mentioned having sent to Professor Grindle—without Nikomis's knowledge or consent. But as it was, he was satisfied, and lost no time in getting to his chamber, where he found a cheerful fire burning, evidence of his brother's kindly forethought. He sat down before the fire, with the parchment in his hands.

After he had sat there for awhile, stretching his chilled fingers toward the leaping blaze, a singular temptation came to him. He longed to burn the document which he had been so near losing, and had recovered only by so exceptional a chance. He held it out to the flame—then snatched it hastily back again. Presently he repeated the action, this

time keeping it extended until one of the corners had become brown; but he could not quite resolve upon the sacrifice, and the parchment was withdrawn once more. Finally, as though fearful lest he should commit the deed by a sort of fascination, without intending it, he jumped up, walked to the table, and laid the parchment down upon it.

His hesitation thus disposed of, Golightley threw off his clothes, bathed himself from head to foot, dressed himself in elaborate evening costume, scented his handkerchief, beard, and hands, and finished by drawing on his neatest pair of patent leather boots. This done, he seated himself at his table, took out writing materials, and wrote far into the night.

Cuthbert had spent the afternoon in his study, looking over and putting in order the MS. pages of his History. The work, the labour of a lifetime, was incomplete; and no one who had beheld its author's emaciated countenance, could have doubted that, so far as he was concerned, it must remain so.

"It's been a failure in the same way that my life has been," he murmured to himself at last, leaning back in his chair. "There are good passages in it, and the plan of it was not altogether amiss; but Heaven has not seen fit to furnish such odds and ends as alone could have rendered it an effective and intelligible whole. So, being a failure, it had

better perish—the manuscript, I mean! Ah, me! why didn't I concentrate all my wisdom in some Æsopian fable about mice or chimney-swallows, which children might have learned by heart, and sages have quoted three thousand years from now! That had been a worthier fruit of sixty years, methinks, than a handful or two of ashes. Vain man, who didst undertake more than thou couldst accomplish! Well,—here goes!"

He took the thick pile of MSS. from the table, and laid it—not without a certain half-playful reverence—amidst the burning logs upon the hearth. Then, with his cheek upon his hand, and an occasional smile stirring the corners of his mouth, he looked on until the busy flame had mastered every page of the famous History.

"That was easily done!" said he. "I wish all human mistakes and shortcomings could be so simply and comfortably rectified! If free murder and suicide were not immoral, what a blessing they would be!"

After a long interval of still meditation, he continued:

"How funny it is that I, simple as I sit here, have remained all my life as unread as my history! I have been loved, and liked, and some people have been a little afraid of me, and a few, I trust, have positively disliked me; but no one has known me, heart and brain at once; though my Martha knew

the one, and honest Tom Grindle does more than justice to the other. And sweet, haughty little Elinor has come very close to me. Still, I have been alone. Not willingly, Heaven knows! It is not that I am more nice than wise, but more odd than nice! I can't tell people now to get at me; and if they don't hit the mark the first time, all my efforts to explain myself only seem to puzzle them the more. Most human beings were made in pairs, or quartets, or scores; but I am one of those unfortunates who were put together from the spare pieces and must remain unmated.

"Yet my range of sympathies must be pretty wide, since I have made friends with two such diverse personages as Elinor and Nikomis! I suspect Nikomis of having made great sacrifices in my behalf, in addition to the grim devotion with which she has tended me through my illness. She meant us no good when she first came here; but, somehow or other, I have won that unspeakable old organ which serves her for a heart. She means to deny her unhappy grandson for my sake: I am to pass my last days in affluence at the expense of my nephew! But I will have a grand explanation with her this evening. How surprised she will be when I open upon her the vials of my omniscience! She will think that during my long association with her, I must have found means to appropriate some of her witchcraft. But it has really been touching to

behold her, and all the other good people, walking on tiptoe and laying their fingers on their lips in my presence, in order to spare me the pain and humiliation of discovering secrets which I knew before they did! And I solemnly accept my *rôle* of deaf, dumb, and blind. But I must reveal my duplicity now, since a week hence my nephew upstairs (though he were the most deserving young gentleman out of gaol) would be too late for his legacy. Nikomis shall help me prepare a statement that may satisfy Tom's scruples: and to-morrow, when he and Garth are both here, we will hold a cabinet council!

"The beloved old Hottentot! Methinks I see a possible way out of the woods for him. He shall not marry naughty Madge—in fact, I doubt whether she be quite naughty enough, or quite unselfish enough either, to let him do so. But when I shall have shaken the soul of that poor, shameful, pathetic brother of mine, Elinor will be free; and then, if Garth cannot manage the rest, he is more faint of heart than I believe him.

"But poor, vain, pathetic Golightley, with his mystery which has been, for him, the saddest of mysteries! what shall become of him? If my life could be of service to him, he were most welcome; but that's absurd; and he has used up everything else! Yet what a pity that—since the only thing I can hope successfully to achieve in this world is a

speedy getting out of it—I should be unable to benefit any one by my departure. I have no fortune to bequeath—no forlorn hope to head; I'm not even in anybody's way—except my own! But come, Cuthbert! no grumbling. I'll at all events minister unto my brother until this not too solid flesh has melted: I fear he won't find many to take his part after I am gone.

"So! there comes my stern friend pain again. What a rigorous guide is this which brings me to thee, my own gentle Cotton Martha! I wish this might be the last stage of the journey."

The hour of physical anguish which now ensued for Cuthbert, was also the one which saw the departure from Urmhurst of Sam Kineo, after a not very genial parting scene with his grandmother. When therefore, a few hours later, she and Cuthbert had speech of each other, the interview pointed to results somewhat different from those which he had anticipated. They did not hear Golightley come in; but the new light upon affairs had made Cuthbert so anxious to see him, that at length, by way of beguiling his suspense, he crossed the passage, and opened the door of Eve's chamber. Nikomis came behind him.

Golightley was standing in the centre of the room, his back to the door. He was clad in full evening dress. On the table beside him were written papers, neatly arranged. In his hands he held an object

which Cuthbert was at first unable to discern; but instinctively he glanced up at the wall above the fireplace. Captain Neil's historic pistol was missing from its accustomed place.

Golghtley, unconscious of the other's presence, raised the weapon, his left hand grasping the barrel, while his right was on the lock. The muzzle was aimed at his breast.

"Brother!" cried Cuthbert; and hurried desperately forward.

With a great start, as of one whose nerves had been wrought up almost to the pitch of madness, Golightley turned partly round. At the same moment his thumb tightened convulsively on the trigger. The pistol exploded; the ball grazed his own shoulder, and buried itself in Cuthbert's heart. And Cuthbert, with only a sigh, as of a tired child dropping asleep, fell forward on his face, never to suffer pain of mind or body any more.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE VICTIM.

ELINOR and Mrs. Tenterden had driven home from the lake in the parson's sleigh; and he, after gallantly helping them to alight, and wishing them a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year in advance, had left them at the door of the Danvers' cottage, and slid away with jingling bells to his own dwelling.

Mrs. Tenterden had enjoyed her day greatly, and even the unexplained disappearance of Madge and Garth had occasioned her no anxiety. As for Golightley's equally unceremonious secession, she had openly quizzed Elinor about it, archly warning her that she must not practise too far upon the good nature even of such a long-suffering man as he. After they got back to the cottage, the good lady called her to her room, to listen to an ex-

haustive and leisurely recapitulation of the day's doings, in the course of which every incident that had come under Mrs. Tenterden's observation was brought up for judgment, and dismissed with a laugh, in which it was taken for granted that Elinor joined. At length, when nothing was left but to slay the slain over again, the younger lady remarked that it was late, and that she would go to her own room. The elder thereupon kissed her affectionately and bade her good-night, with the assurance that things would soon begin to look more cheerful for them all. In that persuasion she went sumptuously and peacefully to bed, and Elinor left her.

But Elinor could not rest. She waited a long time in the hope that Madge might appear; pacing up and down her little room, or standing in anxious expectation at the window. But Madge came not; and the white road, and the field and naked forest beyond, looked lonelier and more lifeless as the empty minutes passed. Unable, at last, to endure inactive suspense any longer, she put on her cloak and hood, left the house, and set off at a swift pace toward Urmhurst.

Garth, arriving at the lake upwards of two hours after he had left it, and finding it deserted, supposed that Madge must have got there in time to accompany the others home. The question was, whether they had gone to Urmhurst or to the cottage? After some consideration, Garth decided

that he at any rate would return to Urmhurst, and, if Madge was not there, would defer seeing her until the next day. Accordingly he unfastened his skates, and struck off through the woods in that direction. In rather more than an hour, weary in soul and body, he came in sight of the house and approached the porch. Some one was standing beneath it; was it Madge? It was not until he stood within reach of her that he recognised Elinor. He took her hand; then both at once asked the same question:

"Where is she?"

Garth's fingers relaxed their hold and his arm dropped to his side.

"You have been to the cottage?" he asked at length, in a dull tone.

Elinor nodded. She could not say anything.

"Oh, Madge! I trusted you: you asked me to forgive you." His voice had lost all life and depth; he leant against one of the stunted oak trees that supported the porch, and breathed like a man exhausted.

Before Elinor could comprehend the significance of his words, a sharp, violent noise from within the house smote upon their ears. Garth raised his head slowly.

"Who is in this house?" he asked, with something akin to indignation in his tone.

"I've not been in," replied Elinor faintly, press-

ing her hand on her heart. "There can be no one but your father and Nikomis—and perhaps Golightley."

He stood erect again and manned himself. "Give me your hand," said he. "Will you come?"

She replied only by tightening her slender clasp. Garth threw open the heavy door fiercely, and they went in. Half way down the hall they paused a moment to listen. The stillness was complete. "It may be nothing!" said he.

But when they reached the foot of the stairs, an invisible, appalling warning met them—the faint odour of burnt powder. Garth stopped short, and for several seconds his heart seemed to fail him: he gasped audibly, and his hand grew rigid and shook. Then Elinor's courage roused itself, and she drew him on, striving to make him feel her voiceless sympathy. They went up the stairs together, and stood on the threshold of Eve's chamber.

Nikomis was sitting on the floor, with Cuthbert's head on her knee, and was parting back the grey hair from his forehead with one hand. His eyes were half closed; Elinor and Garth knew at once that he was dead. Golightley, in his evening dress, half sat on the table, in an attitude which, but for the circumstances, would have appeared jaunty. His left hand held the pistol by the barrel; with his right he was tremulously adjusting his eyeglasses. The expression of his features seemed, at

the first glance, to indicate stupid annoyance—hardly more than that. Stretched along the still air hung a thin veil of smoke.

Garth relinquished Elinor's hand and came forward a few heavy steps, fetching his breath with a slight scrape in the throat at each inspiration. He had not looked at the dead body, after his first glance at it: his eyes were fixed constantly on Golightley, whose blank gaze wandered and shifted uncertainly. Garth faced him for a long time, without word or gesture. At length he extended one arm, and waved the open hand towards his uncle, as if mutely to command his attention.

Golightley stirred uneasily, and passed his tremulous fingers down his cheek. He moved his lips to speak, but could make no sound.

"How came you alive?" demanded Garth.

Again the other's lips moved, and at last there came a voice, which had no substance in it, and yet was not a whisper.

"The clumsiest thing! I hadn't oiled the lock. I was very nervous—and his coming in and speaking suddenly made me jump! I had dressed myself on purpose, and—arranged everything. But I missed myself, by George! and——"

At this point his wandering glance lighted upon the solemn whiteness of the dead face, and became riveted there. The pistol slipped from his grasp, and fell to the floor. He stood up, like a man

awakening, and snatched away his eye-glasses, thereby revealing the haggard obliquity of his vision.

"It can't be!" he faltered querulously. "Some mistake—eh? My brother, you know—the only man who would have forgiven me! Who is here? —by George, it's terribly like!—at least, so it strikes me. But there would be no one to forgive me. . . . Oh, Garth, you here? Well, now look at that—you've got the artist's eye—look at that, and tell me if it isn't a likeness!—ha, ha!—eh? isn't it?"

"Garth, why you not kill him—um?" growled Nikomis. "He kill Cuthbert, and laugh! Why you not kill?"

"He tried to die—I cannot help him!" said Garth gloomily. He turned from his uncle and knelt beside his father's body. "This is for me," he said, taking it from the old Indian's support.

Elinor had all this while remained where Garth had left her, near the door. She now came quietly forward to withdraw Golightley from the room. But his mind, which had for a time been shaken off its poise by the horror of his deed, was beginning at last to realise what had happened. He broke into sobs and moans, rubbing his hands over each other, and holding them out entreatingly to Elinor, to Nikomis, and even to Garth.

"My brother! he's dead! Let me go to him—I have a right to go to him, for it was I that killed

him! I have no one but him—everybody will be against me! I shall never be forgiven if you keep me from him! Won't any of you relent to a poor wretch who'd have been dead himself, but for an accident?"

"You must not go to him now!" whispered Elinor. "Come away—hush! Oh, cannot you pray God to forgive you?"

Nikomis seized him roughly by the arm. "You come out, you Golightley!" she growled, pushing him along. "You kill—now you want scalp—um? Next time you want die, you tell Nikomis: me help you—ugh!"

Before Elinor followed these two out of the room, she came and stood near Garth, who, lifting his darkening eyes, met a look of such divine sympathy as he never saw on any face but hers.

"Your father would have forgiven him; and you will forgive him, soon," said she. "Even I had something to forgive."

"Thank you!" he answered, replying to the spirit rather than to the words.

Her eyes brightened through the tears that stood in them; and thus she left him, without further argument, alone.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

SPECIAL PLEADING.

ON the New Year's Eve following, three friends of Garth sat round the kitchen fireplace, discussing the events which had lately taken place. It was morning, breakfast had just been taken, and Garth himself was upstairs, making his final preparations for a journey.

"I don't mind telling you, Professor," said Selwyn, taking up his knee between his clasped hands, "that I'm against it. In the first place, he won't find her; then, if he does, she won't come back with him; and finally, if she did come back with him, it would only make them both worse off than they are now!"

"But he could never rest until he knew there was no more hope," observed Elinor. "And if he were to succeed, Jack, it must be for the best!"

"Ay, I'm of your mind, Miss Elinor," said Professor

Grindle, folding his arms and nodding his thick eyebrows at her. "Let each do his best before saying, 'God wills it otherwise.' That was my dear friend Urmson's plan—and he was the worthiest man I ever knew."

"My friend Garth will be up with him before he's done!" remarked Jack. Elinor gave him a smile, which, after he had meditated on it for a while, cost him a sigh.

"If I were Garth, though," he resumed, "I should never feel anxious about that young lady. If she is not able to take care of herself, may I be—surprised! What could have been neater, for instance, than her management of Kineo? She made him give her his ten thousand pounds on the plea that, if they met with any interruption, it would be safer with her than with him. So it would have been, if she had been as much under his thumb as he fancied she was. But she meant to give him the slip from the first. She has played one of us against the other in a way that grey-haired diplomatists might envy. What a political intriguer she would make! That will be her career, too, if I'm not mistaken. She will set kings and emperors by the ears, and alter the map of Europe, before she's done!"

"I don't know that I'd so greatly object to that!" said Grindle, with one of his uncompromising smiles. "But speaking of Kineo—I understand there was no evidence to convict him on that charge?"

"No, for Garth lit the bonfire with the proofs of the forgery and conspiracy, and all that remained for Kineo was to be locked up a few months for some petty felony or other committed before the grand affair. However, I heard last night that he had taken matters into his own hands. He pitched into one of the gaolers, day before yesterday, with an iron bar from his cell window, and so mauled the poor fellow that his life is still in danger. If he dies, it's either murder or the next thing to it; if he gets well, it's only State's Prison for ten years. But even that is something!"

"Ay, and enough, I trust, Mr. Selwyn. But 'tis strange how all the evil passions and wickedness called up during this long feud between the Urmsons and the Indians, should have centred in this Kineo, who has the blood of both parties in his veins. He is the incarnate emblem of all the wrong done and plotted for two hundred years. May it find its end in him, likewise!"

"Didn't you say, Professor Grindle, that Mr. Urmson had left something relating to Eve—telling what became of her after she disappeared?" asked Elinor.

"It was merely some notes, my dear young lady, of a conversation had with Nikomis on the night of his death. Eve, you are aware, was a strange, reserved, adventurous child, idolised by her father and controlled by no one. A party of these Indians, lurking

in the neighbourhood, made friends with her, and at length enticed her away with them. She and one of their boys—a son of Nikomis—had become quite fond of each other; and Nikomis conceived the idea of having them legally married when they were old enough, and thus, in some undefined manner, compassing a more refined retribution upon the Urmsons than could be wrought by merely killing and scalping her. The plan was agreed to, and the pair were afterwards married by a missionary residing thereabout; and when the child was born, the same priest baptised it with the name of Samuel.

"That's all about Eve, who died a year or so later. But the tribe got to fighting with its neighbours soon after that; and at length, in a night attack, they were nearly all massacred. Nikomis, however, escaped with the boy; and though wounded in the knee, she got safe to Urmsworth with him and with the certificates. Just what she meant to do seems uncertain; most likely she had no definite plan, but thought to lie in wait, and effect whatever mischief circumstances might put in her way. However, circumstances are powerful things, as we all know; and in twenty years they have transformed Nikomis from a foe to a partisan."

"A partisan with exceptions, though," interposed Jack with a smile. "She has always had a wholesome hatred of Golightley, and even Garth hardly

thawed her until very lately. Mr. Urmson was the circumstances!"

"He, and her grandson's delinquencies," rejoined Grindle. "It appears, I find, that she was not aware of the application made to me by Garth for the legacy. She had already refused Kineo the certificates, and purposed destroying them, and so, as it were, blotting him out of existence."

"Mr. Urmson knew nothing of the application either, did he?"

"No, sir: and when, on that last night, he opened the subject to Nikomis, and proposed that the legacy should be settled on Kineo in the form of an inconvertible annuity, so that it might, if possible, avert rather than hasten his destruction, Nikomis would hear nothing of it; and on his persisting, she fetched the certificates and burned them before his eyes. Of course, things being as they are, that makes small difference; and Garth tells me that she is to have sole possession of Urmhurst henceforth."

"Well, things might have been worse!" exclaimed Jack, after a silence. "I don't believe anybody except Nikomis could be hired to live in this house, now, upon any terms. And as for the money part of the legacy, it must have inflicted a bitter pang upon Kineo's manly heart to lose it in just the way he did; and since Garth wouldn't have condescended to touch it under any circumstances, there's no great harm done as far as that goes. All that

troubles me is, that the rogue who was really at the bottom of the whole misery should get off scot free!"

"I think," said Elinor, "that he suffers more than all, and almost more than he can bear. For his punishment is not such as to harden his heart: it has made it sensitive beyond what it ever was before."

"Ay, his pain is great," said the Professor gravely. "Were it greater, the poor wretch's brain, which already betrays occasional unsteadiness, would collapse utterly; and that, I apprehend, may be the final result in any case. But God's ways are not our ways; and strange though it seems to us, 'tis doubtless true—that if anything redeems Golightley Urmson's soul, 'twill be his having slain his brother at the moment when he sought his own life. And Cuthbert, I'm well assured, would gladly have laid down his life for such an end. Nay, it was a happy release to him in any case. The disease he had would have killed him, with lingering pain, after a few months more. But, as it was—just one heart-throb, and then—rest!" The Professor's throat swelled, and his eye-glasses became dim.

A few moments afterward Garth came in. He wore a long topcoat with a cape to it, and held a fold of papers in his hand. Standing by the fire-place, facing them all, his square, impressive figure and visage filled the eye of the beholder and satis-

fied it, as a portrait by Rembrandt might have done; only that Garth was no portrait, but a reality. His beard was gone, and a deep scar was visible on his chin.

"I've read what my uncle wrote in Eve's chamber, on that night," said he. "Before I go, I must tell you of it. Elinor, you remember his story, that first evening we sat round this hearth? It was a veiled confession, characteristic of him. Did you ever think what that triangular parchment may have been?"

"He told me, once—at least, he hinted that it was a later will of his father's, leaving everything to him."

Garth shook his head. "It was not that. It was the marriage-lines of Brian Urmson and Maud Golightley, dated at Jamestown in 1781. The marriage was a secret one: their second marriages, which each made in the belief of the other's death, were illegal; and the children of them—my father and Mrs. Tenterden—illegitimate."

"Ay, and so poor Maud's flight northward is explained," murmured the Professor, grasping his beard and throwing one knee over the other. "It was her husband, not her lover, that she sought. But proceed, sir!"

"I tell it only for its bearing on my uncle. Maud and Captain Brian agreed never to reveal their secret, and thus discredit their innocent children.

The captain had already willed his property to Cuthbert; Maud, when she disappeared from her home, left all she had to Mildred. But when Eve and Golightley were born—the first and only legitimate children—the captain changed his will; half the property was to go to Eve; the other half, less two thousand pounds, remained Cuthbert's: the two thousand was for Golightley.

"Long after Maud's death, Golightley found the marriage lines in the garret, and learnt that he was the only legitimate son and heir. He was not man enough either to confront the captain with the record, or to burn it up and say nothing. Instead, he hid it, and, without ever meaning to use it against his brother, he enjoyed the secret sense of power it gave him. He brooded over the injustice done him, and by degrees lost all habit of frank speech and thought, and grew sly and hypocritical. —It's piteous to think of! for, after all, his intentions were good."

"But if ever a man paved hell with such things, he did!" muttered Jack.

"It was not until after he got to Europe, and fell into difficulties," resumed Garth, "that he said to himself, as he has written here, 'If I ask the captain for part of the money which should by rights have belonged to me, he will give it me rather than have Cuthbert know that his mother was not a wife.' And when, twenty years after-

ward, he met the Tenterdens, he said in the same way, 'This fortune ought to be mine; I was defrauded out of it.' It seems to me tragical! His sin, as he told us in his story, was so subtle, that the more it was reasoned about, the more like a virtue it looked: and his Doppelganger, though secretly poisoning his soul, was ostensibly his best friend all the while."

"Well—there may be a clean spot left somewhere on his moral carcass yet—I hope there is, with all my heart!" exclaimed Jack. "But I should admire him even more than I do, if, when he contemplated endowing another world with himself, he had burnt up the triangular parchment, and held his tongue."

"He did try to burn it, but his heart failed him," replied Garth. "He could not bear to die without having put his poor excuse before the world. He had found an honest way to be dishonest: there could hardly be a more perilous discovery. I don't think we ought to condemn him.—Well, I didn't mean to talk so much; but I couldn't be silent, either!"

With these words Garth thrust the folded papers into his pocket, and met the glance of each of his three friends in turn; and in all he read the silent acknowledgment of his appeal for mercy. After a pause he said:

"Now I'm going!"

He shook hands with Professor Grindle and with Jack, who, after the manner of deep-hearted men, tried to make the strenuousness of their gripe compensate for the barrenness of their farewell words. But Elinor, as she put her hand in his, remembered their former parting, in the firelight on the frozen lake, a week before, and said, "God help you, Garth!" as she had said it then.

As he stood on the porch a few minutes afterwards, the venerable parson drove up in his sleigh. Although this reverend gentleman had officiated at the funeral the day previous, and had come this morning on purpose to see Garth off, he had become quite oblivious of both facts during his morning drive through the cold bright air.

"What! Garth, lad, where are you off so early?" he bellowed. "Going courting, I expect—eh? ho, ho, ho! Well, you'll find her at the cottage, I suppose; though, now I think of it, I've not seen Maggie for the last day or two. But you'll find her, I don't doubt. Well, good luck to ye, dear lad, and a Happy New Year! O aye, you young folks think all your years are sure to be happy ones: but I guess you'll be none the worse off for an old man's blessing, any way—eh? haw, haw, haw!"

With that laugh, mighty in spite of its occasional cracks and quavers, resounding in his ears, and, as it were, driving home the godspeed which had preceded it, Garth started on his quest.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD.

INE months later, as Garth was packing his trunk in a room of one of the smaller Parisian hotels, a card was brought up to him; and almost before he had found time to read the name it bore, the person to whom the name belonged made his appearance.

"Garth, dear old curmudgeon!"

"Jack!"

They shook hands; but the next moment Selwyn impulsively threw his arms round his friend, and hugged him.

"Are you packing that trunk or unpacking it?" he demanded.

"I am starting for Vienna this afternoon. How long since you have been on this side of the water?"

"Not long. But why to Vienna?"

"I've not found her yet," replied Garth, looking down, "but I heard——"

"I know you haven't found her!"

Garth looked up.

"Because I found her myself, yesterday," Jack continued. "I say, don't look at a fellow that way! I've done you no harm!"

"Does she know I am here?"

"Yes. Garth—she's been playing hide-and-seek with you from the beginning: she won't see you: she's afraid of you: you'll never meet her—and that's the long and short of it!"

"She need not be afraid of me," said Garth, with a deep tremor in his voice. "Where is she?"

"I promised her not to tell."

Garth's face slowly darkened: but Jack, with tears springing to his eyes, came and sat on his knee and put one arm across his shoulders.

"Just listen to me, will you? and don't break my heart by sticking that cursed obstinacy of yours in the face of God's Providence! There are some things no man can do; and this is one of them. Look here—the confounded woman is married!"

"Is that the truth?"

"Do you think I came here to lie to you, Garth Urmson? Of course she is married, man! She's not such a fool. . . . As to who her husband is, that's of small consequence; some infernal German

baron or other! She's living a life you'd as well not inquire into; but it might have been worse. She has got what she bargained for, and it's to be supposed she likes it. She's the finest woman on the Continent, past the ghost of a doubt: but—well, she wishes you to let her alone. She said you hadn't cared for her for the last four years at least, and in proof of it, she showed me a sketch you'd made while you and I were over here together, of a certain young lady's face. I must say that rather floored me!"

Garth started and reddened. "Elinor's!" he murmured.

"Never mind, old boy!" said Jack: "I've had time to forgive you since yesterday, though she has not, but keeps the sketch always within reach—a sort of *memento mori*, you know. But all I meant to prove to you is, that you can't do anything—you simply can not!"

Garth sat gazing straight before him, his hand twisting the hair that clustered on his head, as Selwyn had so often seen him do, when deep in thought, at college. At last he said, almost inaudibly:

"Well."

"I'll step out on the balcony," added Jack, getting off his friend's knee, "and smoke a cigar, while you're—unpacking that trunk again! Then I shall have something else to tell you."

"No," said the other with a smile, "I don't need to be alone, Jack. I've done my best: now I give it up. May God bless her!"

"Amen!—though she is the devil!" muttered Jack.

"As to your other news, I can guess what that is," continued Garth. "You are going to be—or perhaps you already are——"

"Let me tell my own news, will you?—I'm engaged!"

"Is that your idea of news?"

"It is news, you'll find! I'm engaged—but not to Elinor Golightley!"

"I don't understand you!" said Garth after a pause, his brows lowering somewhat.

"Let's look at him! is he entirely shocked, or secretly pleased into the bargain?—Entirely shocked, of course! Well, the name of the new young lady—you have heard of her: we used to read poetry about her in college—is Bellona, Goddess of War!"

"Jack, tell me what you mean!"

"Well, I don't know as it's much to my credit," said Jack, with rather a sad laugh, "but it's this way! Elinor Golightley is beyond me. She strikes notes I can never reach, tiptoe as I may: and if the love I've felt for her can't make me reach them, nothing else can. So I give it up, as you say. She said to me nine months ago, 'you don't know me;

but you shall have opportunity to know me, and then——' Garth, I should be a fool as well as a selfish brute if I married her. She is meat for heroes; by which I mean to say (though I'm not given to running myself down as a general thing) that she's beyond me, and beyond any man I know —except one!"

"I'm glad you spoke to me of this, Jack," said Garth, rising from his chair and going up to him. "I may be able to save you from making a great mistake. I don't know what has put these notions into your head—but it's all wrong! You love her so well that you think you can't be worthy of her —that's all. It's what every honest man feels about the woman he loves; and it's a true feeling; but if we didn't trust to God to make us worthy, there would soon be no more marriages! Besides, you must think of her! Women don't love as we do; and certainly Elinor Golightley, with her shyness and haughtiness— Don't laugh, Jack, at my pretending to instruct you in these matters. When a man is in love, as you are, his friend may sometimes comprehend his position better than he himself can—even though that friend be ordinarily thick-headed!"

"My dear friend, I have long known that your thick-headedness is merely an appearance, artfully assumed to cover fathomless depths of guile. But I'm all the more obliged to you! By the way, what

do you think of doing with yourself now? Go home, or become an exile?"

"I don't know!" said Garth, a little disconcerted.

"What do you say to coming down with me to Italy, and joining Garibaldi? You could wear that old red shirt of yours, you know, and be quite in the fashion. But you must be ready to start in three days, for all my preparations are made. Come, I won't be jealous, even in the event of your rising faster and higher in the good graces of Miss Bellona than I do! Will you go?"

"You will not go, Jack."

"Now, by God!" cried Selwyn, the blood rushing to his cheeks, "I won't be bullied and dictated to by you! I'm no baby, Garth, to go babbling about without a purpose! I have learnt a fact which, if I hadn't been a blind ass, I should have seen from the beginning; I come to you to ask your pardon and make amends, and you put me off with a long-winded, flowery speech, that has no particle of sincerity in it. . . Well, no, I don't mean that. But it's no use, old fellow! I shouldn't have come to you if it hadn't been settled. The fact is, she loves you, and has always loved you; you love her, and have always loved her. You were born and grown for each other. Bless you, my children! This is irregular and premature, of course; and as Aunt Mildred would say, I'm perfectly scandalised, my good fathers, well I do think in my heart, did you

ever! But why should we dodge each other, Garth?"

Garth knew that beneath this screen of gaiety, his friend was rendering him the dearest sacrifice that friends can make: and he blenched at the thought of taking the bread of life from the mouth of this too generous recusant.

"You have no grounds for what you assume, Jack," he said, with a troubled voice. "Don't do what both you and she might regret for ever!"

Selwyn again approached him and threw his arm round him. "Garth, do violets ever grow in New Hampshire so late as October?" he asked. "Ha! theatric start of villain detected in his guilt!—Because I saw one a few days ago—pressed, you know, on the blank leaf between the Old and New Testaments of a little pocket Bible—which I hope you may have the pleasure of perusing some time. And what with the violet and the sketch, and my own mother-wit and wisdom, here I am, requesting the honour of shaking hands with you!"

"Oh, Jack, I wish it had been my luck to do this for you!"

"Give me that old red shirt of yours instead, and I'll call it square," returned Jack, laughing lightly. "Well, good-bye for the present. Of course, you know, if it would really inconvenience you very much to leave a card, any time during the week, at a certain suite of rooms in the Grand Hotel—it's

your own affair, and I shouldn't dream of forcing your inclination. I am off for my General's tent in Italy. A hero's death, or victory and no pay! Farewell!"

So one day Garth found himself in a large room, all mirrors, gilding and French furniture, waiting for some one to appear.

She came in at last, with a wide throwing-open of the door which had always characterised her, and was not inconsistent with a nature in so many ways reserved and shy. Garth stepped forward to meet her, and they shook hands: her hand was cold, she scarcely smiled, and her face wore that distant and rather haughty expression which he knew so well, and loved because he knew it. Then followed some highly commonplace conversation; and at last Garth bethought himself to inquire:

"Is Mrs. Tenterden well?"

"I believe so;—yes, I mean, very well! She'll be down in a minute."

Elinor had taken her seat on one of those comfortless little gilded chairs which only a French mind could have originated; a chair which made her seem three times as unapproachable as she would have looked without it, and that is saying much. But a brave man is not to be defeated even by a French chair. Garth walked across the polished floor and stood beside her. She glanced up in fear

—in that sweetest of all fears, which no pen can describe. He said:

"Then I have only a minute to tell you that I love you. I want to tell you with my whole life!"

It was not more awkward, perhaps, than most impromptu love declarations. He had an idea, but not the leisure or composure to present it in its neatest and most logical form.

Elinor drooped, and hung her head. Garth bent and kissed her cheek, which flamed pink as the kiss came. An instant later she had put her hand in his, and risen, and looked in his eyes. What were French chairs, or the world, to them?

Mrs. Tenterden did not make her entrance for fully quarter of an hour; such, at least, was the testimony of the two clocks, the ormolu and the bronze one, which ticked at each other from the ornamental mantelpieces at opposite sides of the room. But to Garth and Elinor it was a long time, because enough for them to be made all over new in it: and yet the least of times, because, probably, there was a taste of eternity in it.

Just before Mrs. Tenterden appeared, Elinor said:

"Dear Jack! I love him, Garth!"

Garth, strange to tell, kissed her for those words. But such is friendship, and such is love!

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

URMHURST STEPS DOWN.

THE August of the following year was a very hot one in New England; and when Garth and his wife landed in Boston, their scheme of riding by easy stages to Urmhurst seemed by no means so practicable as it had done while they were still on the cool Atlantic.

"Wife, we must give it up!" said Garth. "The horses would be sunstruck even if we escaped."

"Perhaps it will be cooler soon?" suggested Elinor.

"Not for six weeks at least!" returned the husband, shaking his head. "Except at night!" he added. "You never experienced a New England summer."

"Show me an almanack," said the wife, after a pause.

"Here is the Farmer's Almanack," answered the husband, taking it from his pocket. "Sit down, and I'll show you. But I hope my wife is not so weak-minded as to believe that these prophecies are trustworthy ?"

"Garth, this is only an hotel parlour! Some one might come in!"

Garth took no notice of this irrelevant remark. "This is the twelfth ?" he asked.

"It is the eleventh," said accurate Elinor.

"Well, here is the twelfth, then!"

"Oh Garth! you know you meant what day of the month!"

"Men are not like women; they can mean more than one thing at a time!" returned the husband with an unsympathetic laugh. "Well, look here—as Jack would say. 'August eleventh'—"

"Dear old Jack!"

"We must get in the habit of calling him Lieutenant, Mrs. Urmson; for if his wound is well enough for him to meet us on the Nile next winter, he will stand upon his rank."

Elinor thought in her heart that his wound would not be well enough, either then or thereafter; but she said nothing, and Garth went on:

"'August eleventh — about this time expect warm weather, with occasional thunder-showers.' How do you suppose the man could have known ?"

"Give me the almanack! That is not what I wanted to see at all!"

"It's no trouble for me to hold it for you."

"You promised me you would shave every day, and I am sure you have not done it! Tell me about the moon."

"The moon is round: it is like a cheese: it has two eyes, a nose, and——stay one moment; thirteen is an unlucky number, Elinor—Mrs. Tenterden says so!"

"Oh, Garth! you have grown so silly since we were married—and so sweet! I always have to laugh at you now; and I used to be afraid of you, even after I began to like you! But tell me, really, when is there a full moon?"

"On the fifteenth, dear Mrs. Urmson."

"And how long would it take us to ride to Urmhurst?"

"Three or four days."

"Well, then, don't you see, my good but slow-witted husband, that we can also ride there in three or four nights, when there will be no hot sunshine, but only a cool beautiful moonlight: and in the day time we can have siestas, like people in the tropics—now isn't that a good idea?"

"We'll try it," replied Garth, with an affectation of non-committal gravity. "At least it may save us something in mosquitoes."

That same night, accordingly, they set out, having

previously despatched a courier before them to prepare a halting-place for the next day. The experiment was a complete success; they rode leisurely onward, and as the city was left behind them, there were only the inner voice of crickets and tree-frogs, and the clear hoof-tramps of the two grey horses to interrupt the deep moonlit stillness. The world seemed all their own—a grave, silent, beautiful solitude. It pleased them more than bustle and brilliance, for it seemed to press them yet more closely to each other, and to expound to them the full, ineffable delight of mutual love and dependence. Occasionally the front of a wayside farm-house, grey with the rains and suns of many years, or glistening white with new paint, would echo back the sound of the horses' hoofs; or a dog would bark watchfully, and be answered by other dogs far off and near. Sometimes tall elm or butternut trees flung their black shadows across the pale roadway; sometimes sweet odours of unseen flowers breathed forth a greeting. When a brook crossed their path, they would draw rein awhile to listen to its liquid volubility; and again, they paused long to catch the distant murmur of the Atlantic on their right. It was a journey of enchantment through a land of dreams. True, there were mosquitoes—a sharp-tongued, business-like race, who do much to mitigate the romance of New England summer nights; but even they were

greatly baffled by the breeze of their victims' motion, and could scarcely do more than make the enchantment seem less of a dream and more of a reality.

Garth and Elinor talked but little as they rode; but for miles at a stretch they would go hand in hand; and sometimes, where the road was even and the pace a walk, the husband's arm would find its way round the wife's waist. At last, just as the dawn began to blanch the east, and the first bird launched forth its song, they came to the farm-house where they were to pass the day; and while the haymakers sweltered in the noontide sun, they slept. In the afternoon they put on broad-brimmed straw hats and strolled forth into the fields and rocky pastures, and sat beneath the shadow of trees, or stained their fingers and lips with blackberries, and at night, after the farm folks had gone yawning to bed, Garth saddled the horses and they set forth once more.

On the fourth night they started from a spot about seven miles south of Wabeno, purposing to be at Urmhurst by sunrise. The road mounted a long irregular acclivity, and so found its way to a rocky pass which wound through the midst of the mountain. On arriving at the highest point of this pass, the whole valley suddenly lay disclosed before them, with the long curves of the river whitening beneath the western moon. But overhead a black cloud

was gathering, and a distant rumble of thunder gave warning of a coming shower. The riders urged their horses beneath the low spreading branches of a chestnut tree, where the heaviest rain would hardly reach them; and there they waited, gazing out upon the broad prospect.

"I shall be glad to see dear old Urmhurst again—sha'n't you?" said Elinor.

"I shall be glad; but I am more glad that we are not to live there. It was a strange fancy our coming here even for a day. All the business might just as well have been done by letter."

"But we could not have seen Parson Graeme and Nikomis by letter! I hope he has remembered to tell her that we are coming."

"Our courier will have informed her, at any rate. She probably knows (even without witchcraft) just where we are at this moment."

"I wonder whether she will be glad to see us."

"I sha'n't expect much cordiality. But when she hears our errand, she ought to unbend a little. I have an idea of making a great picture in illustration of an ancient prophecy—did I ever tell it you?—about Urmhurst and Wabeno?"

"I remember!—when Urmhurst leaves its moorings, Wabeno is to roar—— ?"

"Well, I shall paint that. . . . How bright that light is growing!"

"Yes: and it must be very far off. Isn't that about where Urmhurst is?"

"Yes."

"Oh! how it blazes up. What can it be?—Oh, Garth——" She turned quickly to him, and put her hand excitedly on his arm.

"Yes," said he in a low voice, answering her unuttered suggestion; "it is that, Elinor; Urmhurst is on fire!"

As he spoke, there came a flash of lightning, instantly followed by a thunder-peal so loud that it seemed to shake the mountain. The horses started and trembled. Other peals followed in quick succession; it was as if Wabeno had suddenly awakened from his sleep of unknown ages, and were rousing himself to some great occasion with roar on roar. Meanwhile the flame of the burning house rose higher, and its glare was reflected from the smooth surface of the lake below, and a dark mass of clouds to the northward glowed dull red above. It blazed a mighty beacon to all the land. The wife and husband sat and watched, not speaking, but full of many thoughts. The ancient prophecy was undergoing fulfilment, and they were there to see and hear. They were witnessing the last act of a long and gloomy drama; it was a wholesome act; the beacon was of promise, not of despair. Urmhurst, whose foundations had been

laid in violence and sacrilege, and which had held its position through more than two centuries of wrong and disaster, was now vanishing (like the castles of wicked enchanters in fairy tales), because the evil and lawless spirit which had called it into existence had been finally met and overcome. The spectacle was not therefore a lamentable one; and yet—there being so much in all human works, not mechanical, that appeals to human hearts—Garth and Elinor could not behold the annihilation of the strong old house unmoved. In this world, where nothing that seems stable is really so, all partings that are final must be sad. Long sat they there watching, while the thunder rolled about the mountain, and from time to time passionate showers fell. When the storm was over, they rode forwards, the glow of the conflagration still lighting the northern sky. But as they drew nearer, the earthly fire faded, the clouds vanished from the heavens, and the sun rose clear. It flung the shadow of Urmhurst's eastern chimney across a low heap of blackened ruins; roof, walls and porch were gone; and even the granite threshold had been shattered by the heat into shapeless fragments. It was not known how the fire began, nor were any human remains found amidst the ruins; but that old Indian witch, Nikomis, had disappeared, and was never seen again.

* * * *

Some two or three years later a couple of swifts happened to meet on the top of that tall chimney, which stood the sole survivor of Urmhurst. One was an exceedingly ancient and decrepit swallow; the other was a bird of middle age, who had digested his wild oats, and possessed judgment.

"It appears to me that changes must have occurred in these parts," twittered the latter. "Unless I am mistaken, there was a house here when I was young, and another chimney—an unsalubrious one."

"Yes, yes; you are quite right," piped the old one garrulously. "There was a house, and a chimney, an unsalubrious chimney—a kitchen chimney, in fact. 'Tis a singular fact, by the way, that kitchen chimneys are always unsalubrious. I don't know whether any one has ever generalised the observation before me, but you may rely upon it as being a correct one."

"I have heard it before—when I was quite young—and now I look at you, I believe you were my informant. Yes, it is a fact of general application, as you say. In my youth, it aroused my indignation, and I contemplated crushing out the abuse; but there are so many abuses! The world, one is tempted to believe, almost needs abuses; and besides, as one grows older, one moderates somewhat

one's zeal for reform. Instead of suppressing abuses, one indulges in abuse!"

"Very justly put!" piped the veteran, wiping his bill appreciatingly.

"I was going to inquire," resumed the other, disguising his satisfaction at the compliment with an unconcerned flirt of the wing, "whether the colony has permanently taken flight? You are the oldest bird hereabout, and, I doubt not, the best informed. How is it?"

"You have applied to the right quarter, I assure you," replied the elder, highly gratified in his turn. "If any one can afford you information, I can. The fact is, then, that since the disappearance of the house, the chimney has become unfashionable, and not a bird has built in it. Now, is not that odd? There's as much room as there ever was, and no disturbance; and yet the place is deserted. The house was never a bit of use to us—rather the contrary, some would say!—and yet, since it has departed, so have we! Now, how would you account for that?"

The younger swift turned his head sagaciously, first on one side and then on another, but did not think it worth while to hazard an explanation. The old cock wiped his bill again, and sidled up a bit closer.

"The fact is," he piped confidentially, "in this

world, it is the indirect causes that are the most efficacious! You can't put the fact into more explicit language than that, could you? The indirect causes are the most efficacious!"

"It does sound well, certainly; and now I think of it, I remember having arrived at some such conclusion myself, a long while ago. But is there no prospect of a new house being built here, in place of the old one?"

"No, no, no! The site will never be used again; though some, no doubt, think it a pity. But the owner has crotchets. However, I respect crotchets; and since there's no chance of the owner's living here himself, I don't know that I should care to have any one else. One doesn't usually pay much attention to men and women, of course, though they have their uses—their indirect uses, mind you! But Garth was perhaps more noticeable than some men; he was kind-hearted, patient, and gentle. To give you an example of this: I once had the misfortune to break this limb, and, in consequence, fell down the chimney. He happened to be below, picked me up, and set the fracture so skilfully that—eh?"

The other swift had flown away almost at the beginning of this speech, without the old cock's having observed the circumstance. The latter, when he found himself alone, was at first disposed to be indignant; but, reflecting that truth and

wisdom remain what they are in spite of not being listened to, he smoothed his ruffled feathers, spread his wings, and set off towards the South. But the great chimney still stands erect and lonely, a landmark for many miles.

THE END.

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